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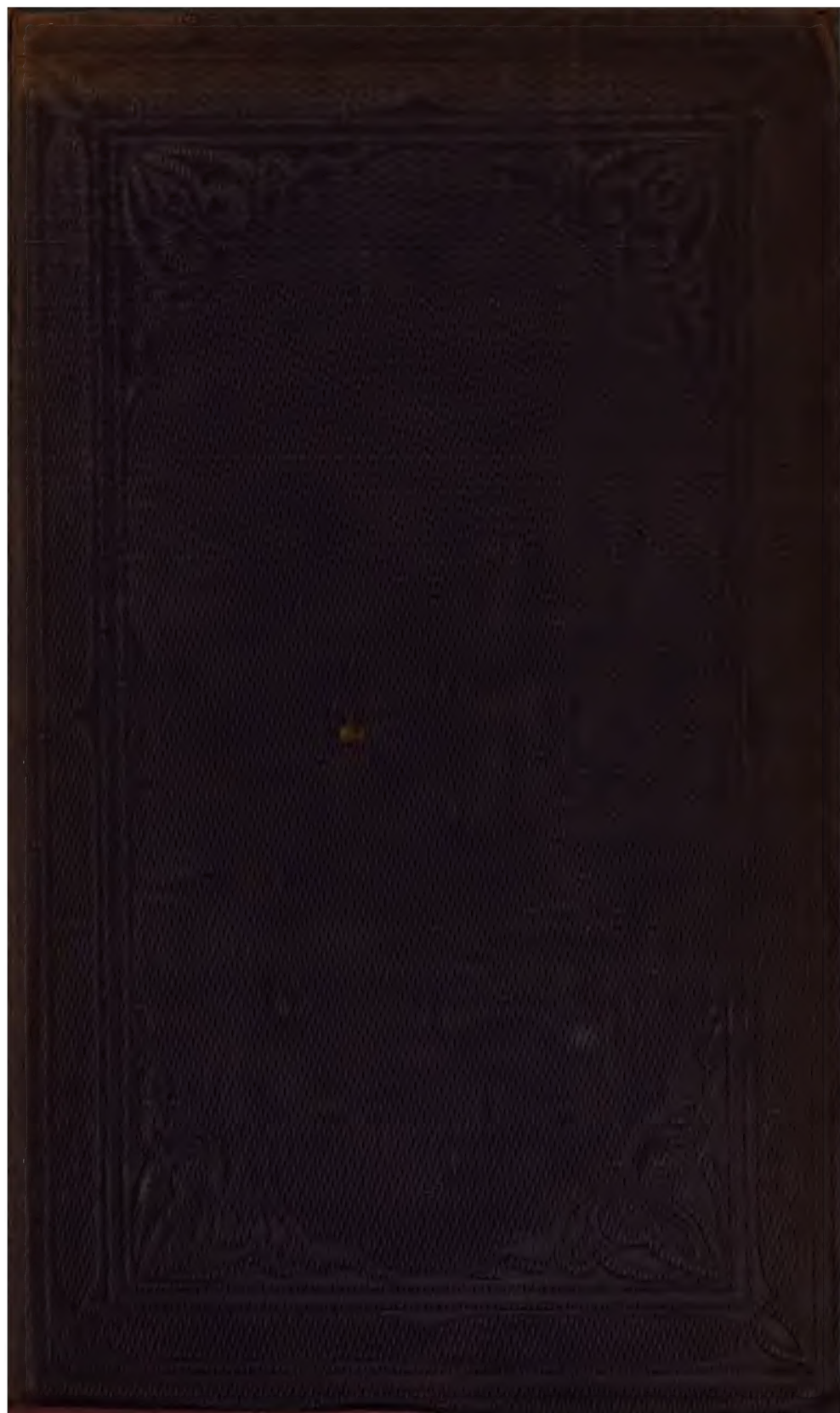
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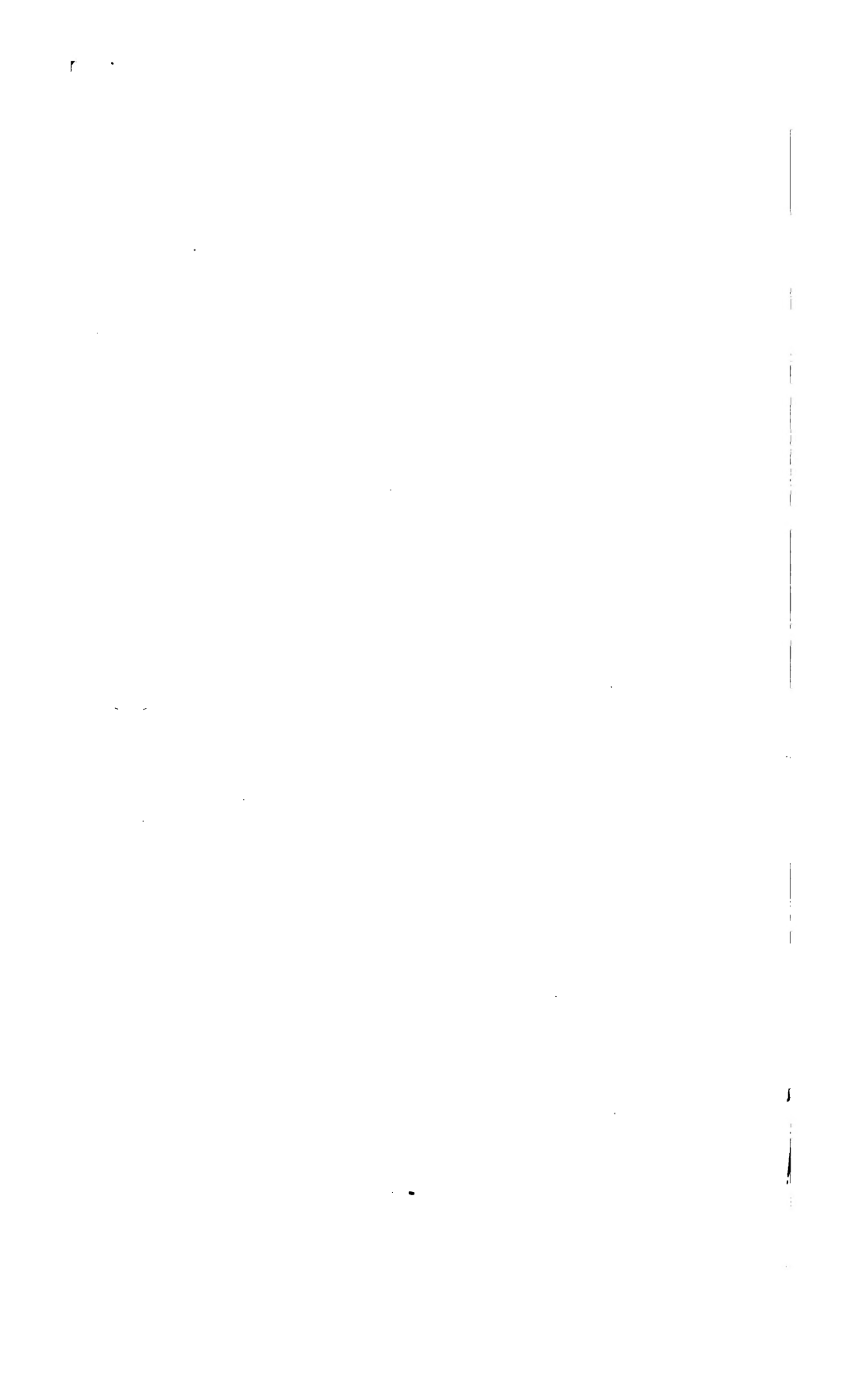
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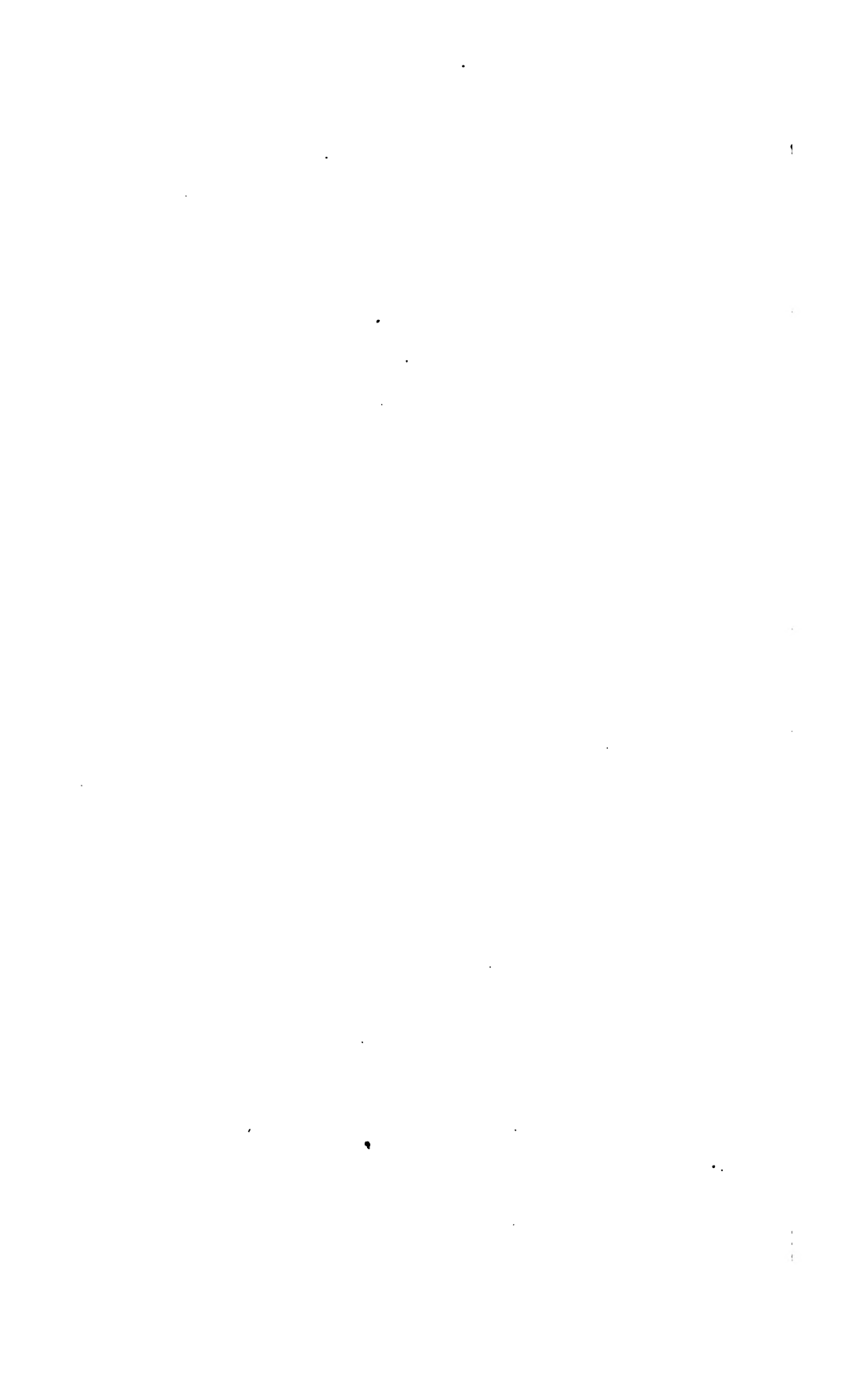








MEDITATIONES HEBRAICÆ.



MEDITATIONES HEBRAICÆ:
OR,
A Doctrinal and Practical Exposition
OF
THE EPISTLE OF
ST. PAUL TO THE HEBREWS,
IN A SERIES OF LECTURES.

BY WILLIAM TAIT, M.A.,

Late Incumbent of Holy Trinity Church, Wakefield; now of St. Matthew's, Rugby.

Tenues grandia conamur.

NEW AND ENLARGED EDITION.

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SUPERIORITY OF CHRIST TO AARON AND HIS SONS.

LECTURE XV.

Hebrews ix. 15—22.

“And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. For a testament is of force after men are dead: otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.”

(We propose a change of reading in this text, and in conformity with this change, would give the following abridgement of its meaning.)

VOL. II. B

The Hebrews have just been reminded that the legal high-priests never had been able either to pacify the conscience or to cleanse the heart; it has also been clearly pointed out to them that Christ is able to do both by his efficacious sacrifice and all-prevailing mediation. But neither this sacrifice nor this mediation, as the Hebrews well knew, belonged to the old covenant; and so the Apostle goes on to argue that a new covenant must of necessity be brought in. Think not however, he continues, oh ye Hebrews, that the covenant of God with our fathers is treated with disrespect and dishonour. It has been set aside indeed, to make room for a better, but not till it has received all the honour which its tremendous sanctions demand. Death was their demand, and they have received it abundantly, for one of the Covenant Makers, even the Son of God, has died.

Such appears to be the scope of the Apostle's argument in the difficult passage before us. Never was an argument more worthy of inspiration. It led the Jew by his very respect for Moses, to that which he hated the most, viz., the doctrine of a crucified Messiah. And it is to us Gentiles, a demonstration of the Saviour's grace and of our obligations to His eternal mercy of the most deeply affecting, yea, overwhelming kind. Let me endeavour to expound it in detail.

And for this cause He is the Mediator of a NEW COVENANT, that DEATH HAVING ACTUALLY TAKEN PLACE for the redemption of the transgressions that was under the first COVENANT, they which are called, might receive THE PROMISED BLESSING of the eternal inheritance.

An efficacious sacrifice and a prevailing Mediation demand, oh ye Hebrews, a new covenant to suit them; the new wine must be put into new bottles. And therefore He who has offered that sacrifice, and opened for us the holiest above, is the Mediator by necessity, of a new and better Covenant. Moreover, if the old covenant was unable to pacify the conscience, if it was unable to cleanse the heart, it was also

unable to bring into the eternal inheritance. Our fathers had the promise of this inheritance, and were called by God to believe in it; but they were under a covenant which was unable to put them in possession. And hence arose another necessity for that covenant being superseded; the heirs of promise could not otherwise receive the accomplishment of the word on which they have been caused to hope.

Two objections, as the Apostle well knew, would occur to the mind of a Hebrew, as he listened to an argument like this. You make the godly of past ages to have perished, would be his first objection; you treat a Divine covenant with disrespect and dishonour, would be his second. Neither objection is left unanswered by the wary and provident reasoner whose words are now before us.

To prevent the former objection from troubling the minds of the Hebrews and prejudicing them against the truth, he reminds them that the new covenant, though then for the first time brought into manifestation, had existed from the beginning. The death of Christ, as he here declares distinctly, was designed to secure not only the eternal salvation of those who were then believing on Him, but "the redemption" also "of the transgressions that were under the first covenant." For the far-seeing eye of the Redeemer, when He gave Himself to be stretched on "the bitter cross," looked not only forward to the end of time, but backward also to its beginning. And the blood of His precious sacrifice was designed to cover, not the sins of new covenant believers only, but those also of Hezekiah and Jehoshaphat, of David and of Samuel, of Aaron and of Moses. Yea, its efficacy extended beyond the date of the first covenant; it covered the sins of Jacob and of Abraham, of Noah, of Enoch and of Abel. That sacrifice had been recently offered when the Apostle wrote these words, but not on that account recently determined by God. The expression "death having actually taken place" marks this in a very striking manner. For while Jesus was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,"¹ His decease then recently accomplished at

¹ Revelation xlii. 8.

Jerusalem, had been delayed till the fulness of time.¹ Think not then, says St. Paul addressing the Hebrews, that our fathers who lived under the first covenant have therefore perished. The remission of sin was granted and the Holy Ghost was given even during the continuance of that Covenant, from respect had in the mind of God to the great sacrifice which has now been offered. And when "the promised blessing of the eternal inheritance" is revealed, the distinction shall be forgotten for ever which now separates the believers of the old from those of the new Covenant. The whole company of the saved from righteous Abel downward, shall then rejoice in the presence of their one Saviour and as the acknowledged children of their one Father.

The second objection was of a more serious kind, and demanded a more extended answer. What St. Paul here urges in reply to it, is therefore expanded in the remainder of the text. Think not, ye Hebrews, he says, that I treat God's covenant with disrespect or set it aside without first giving it all the honour which is its due. Death has actually taken place "for the redemption of the transgressions" committed under it.

For where a COVENANT is (and that Covenant is transgressed) there must also of necessity be the death of the COVENANT MAKER. FOR A COVENANT IS CONFIRMED OVER THE DEAD, otherwise, it is of no strength at all, WHILE THE COVENANT MAKER (who has transgressed it) liveth.

Let us mark the application of this irresistible argument. The Hebrews did not require St. Paul to instruct them in the nature of covenants by sacrifice; such covenants were universal both among heathens and Jews. The contracting parties placed a slain victim between them, and swore to each other over its dead body. And the meaning of this significant act was,—May we die like this victim, if we keep not our plighted word! The statement could not be gained, that the contracting party who violated such an engage-

¹ Luke ix. 31. Galatians iv. 4, 5.

ment must atone for such violation by his death; that a covenant so ratified, was confirmed over his dead body, and had no respect at all whilst he continued to live. The Hebrews moreover were perfectly aware that the covenant between Jehovah and their nation was exactly of this character. The law of Moses was the expression of that covenant; and "he that despised it, died without mercy."¹ "Gather my saints (i.e. my holy nation,) together unto me," is the solemn language of Jehovah to Israel, "those who have struck the covenant with me over the sacrifice." He then threatens the disobedient, according to the sanction of that covenant, I will "tear you in pieces," and there shall be "none to deliver."² The Hebrews knew well that these words were no idle threat. The cases of the Sabbath-breaker and blasphemer in the wilderness, and the case of Achan at Jericho, were familiar to their minds.³ In these and numberless instances besides, the broken covenant had been confirmed over the dead; and the discomfiture of Israel before Jericho, was the most significant possible attestation that such a covenant was dishonoured whilst its violator continued to live.⁴ They had accused the Apostle of dishonouring this Divine covenant, but he now throws back the charge. David, Hezekiah, Jehoshaphat, and all the godly of their nation were, as he has reminded them, transgressors of this covenant. You say of these holy men, he argues, that they are heirs of the eternal inheritance; but with the damnable sentence of a broken covenant hanging over them, how shall they obtain possession? You hope yourselves to arrive at the same inheritance; but you are transgressors even as they; and how then shall you obtain your hope? Listen then to my testimony of Jesus. THE GOD OF ISRAEL THE OTHER CONTRACTING PARTY, has taken our flesh and atoned by his precious blood for our violation of his covenant. Through that death foreseen and fore-appointed, the godly of past ages, belonging to our nation, have already though transgressors, entered into the

¹ Hebrews x. 28.² Psalm l. 5—22. Horsley,³ Numbers xv. 32—36. Leviticus xxiv. 10—16.⁴ Joshua vii. 10—15.

rest and are now waiting for the glory of God. And through the same death now accomplished at Jerusalem, we though transgressors also may enter into the same rest, and look for the same glory. The old Covenant is thus set aside indeed, for it condemns instead of saving. But it is set aside BECAUSE FULFILLED; it is therefore not dishonoured. Dishonoured, did I say? It has more abundant honour in the death of the Son of God than if we all had died eternally. But to look for salvation through that covenant, is to dishonour it indeed, for its awful sanction is thus made of none effect. He then that honours Moses, will welcome a crucified Messiah: he that stumbles at that stumbling stone, dishonours Moses and his law.

The Apostle next appeals to Moses in direct confirmation of his words.

Whereupon neither the first COVENANT was RATIFIED without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, saying, This is the blood of the COVENANT which God hath enjoined unto you. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

Moses himself has left us an account of these ceremonies. He offered, he tells us, burnt-offerings and peace-offerings; and dividing the blood into two parts, he sprinkled half of it on the altar and put the other half in basons. He then read out of the book the words of the Lord to the people; and on their promising to be obedient, he took the hyssop and sprinkled them with the blood, thus admitting them into covenant with God. He does not say indeed that on this occasion he sprinkled the book, but the words before us may *perhaps* admit of being rendered, "*he took the blood, and also the book, and sprinkled all the people.*"¹ He tells

¹ Exodus xxiv. 3—8.

us elsewhere of his sprinkling Aaron and his sons when he set them solemnly apart to minister before the Lord.¹ And if the priests who were to use the vessels of the ministry, were thus consecrated, we may infer that the vessels themselves had the same solemn dedication.

The Hebrews were of course familiar with these facts, nay more, they were aware of their meaning. They knew them as the solemn ratification of the covenant between God and their fathers. God on the one part, lifted up his hand to heaven and sware by his own eternal life, that he would be the God of Israel; his people on the other part, imprecated death upon themselves if they failed to be obedient and keep his holy laws. This solemn compact was ratified or "confirmed over the dead," the death of the victim declaring that he who violated its sanctions should die. Nor was this declared once and by the ministry of Moses alone; the testimony was upheld from generation to generation; the daily sacrifices and annual atonements proclaimed it unceasingly and continually. It was attested by the blood-sprinkled priest, by the blood-sprinkled altar at which he ministered, by the blood-sprinkled vessel which he held in his hand.

But if these Mosaic rites had conveyed no other meaning, they would have ministered despair. For the conscience of every worshipper told him that he was a breaker of that covenant; and viewed in the light in which we have now presented them, they recorded against him only the sentence of death. But another idea, that of SUBSTITUTION, was contained in them. When Abraham was about to offer Isaac, God shewed him a ram caught in a thicket, and he offered the ram instead.² And so the Mosaic worshipper was instructed to bring his sacrifice that its death might be his ransom; that his life might be spared through its life poured forth upon the ground. This taught him indeed most emphatically that he was a sinner, and impressed on him in the most awful manner that the wages of his sin was death. But it taught him besides, that Divine Justice

¹ Exodus xxix. 20, 21. Leviticus viii. 24—30. ² Genesis xxii. 13.

would accept Substitution, and that through the shedding of guiltless blood the guilty might go free.

You know, my brethren, the Apostle would argue, that these things are so, nay that the teaching and ceremonies of fifteen hundred years have been designed to write them upon the very tablets of your hearts. You know that on this very account the covenant of God with our fathers was at the first ratified by blood, and has ever since been "confirmed over the dead." The immolated victims of fifty generations declare that death has ever been and still is its tremendous and irrevocable sanction; we are all transgressors of it, and so doomed to die; nor is there any salvation for us save through the blood-shedding of another in our room. Behold then the Lamb of God! The God of Israel has loved us His people, and given Himself for our redemption. And in the blood of His precious sacrifice the Covenant which he made with our fathers stands everlastingly established and confirmed. It only remains that we turn away from every other refuge, and make Him our confidence and hope.

We Gentiles have no need of this argument; the superseding of the Mosaic Covenant occasions us no difficulty, nay, is a cause only of thankfulness to God. Let us not however on this account turn away lightly from the scripture that is now before us; it teaches lessons of inestimable importance and value.

I. It displays in the most overwhelming manner the grace of Christ our Saviour. He was the God of Israel, one of the contracting parties to Israel's Covenant; it was his guidance which they followed in the wilderness, it was his Spirit which they tempted and grieved.¹ And when that covenant was violated and demanded the death of the violator, he, though the faithful party, took the place of the unfaithful; though the just, he died for the unjust; though the guiltless, he shed his blood for the guilty. What excellent grace, what exceeding love was here! And this excellent grace, this exceeding love is ours. "Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles

¹ I Corinthians x. 4. 9.

also."¹ He shewed himself to be the God of the Jew by dying to repair his breach of the legal covenant. And he has shewn himself to be equally the God of us Gentiles by dying for our sins, and bequeathing to us, ratified in his blood, a new and better covenant of everlasting peace. The obligation is equal to one Divine Redeemer. And in the church therefore which he hath purchased to himself, "there is neither Greek nor Jew...but Christ is all, and in all."²

II. It shews the true place of the creature and that salvation is of God alone. Many expect to be saved by keeping the baptismal covenant. With them the gospel is simply a remedial law, with Christ for its Mediator instead of Moses. And because this Mediator is full of gentleness and grace, they trust that he will accept their sincere though confessedly imperfect obedience. But there is no such remedial law in the dispensations of God with man. If we will make a covenant of salvation with Him, we must either keep its terms perfectly or stand condemned for our failure. Noah's covenant was entirely on God's part; man was the receiver only. Abraham's covenant was of the same character; the inheritance came to him "by promise,"³ in the way of obedience indeed, but not as its reward. The solemn transaction at Sinai is the only example in the history of the world of a *covenant between God and the creature*. And man failed so completely in the fulfilment of its terms that had not God interposed to save him, the death of the victims with which that covenant was ratified, would have been only a foreshewing of his eternal perdition. If the baptismal covenant is of the same character, Calvary is its ratification; Calvary denounces death on those who fail to keep its terms. What then are those terms? That we "keep God's holy will and commandments, and walk in the same, all the days of our life," i. e. that we love the Lord our God with all our heart and our neighbour as ourselves.⁴ If we fail to render this measure of obedience, the baptismal covenant will condemn instead of saving. And the death of Christ, so far from

¹ Romans iii. 29. ² Colossians iii. 11. ³ Galatians iii. 18. Genesis xlviii. 19.

⁴ Church Catechism, Matthew xxii. 36—40.

speaking of pardon and ministering peace, will speak only of wrath, and minister discomfort and dismay. For it is God's solemn testimony that "the wages of sin is death."¹ Jesus himself reminds us on his way to Calvary, "if they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?"² If he died though guiltless, because the sins of others were charged on him, how shall we stand before God, when called on to answer for our own?

Is there then no baptismal covenant? There is assuredly; but like the covenant made with Noah, it is entirely on God's part *so far as salvation is concerned*; man is only the receiver of His grace. It more than resembles God's covenant with Abraham; it is that covenant amplified, for Abraham is "the father of all them that believe."³ Let us then observe his behaviour, and the place of humility which he took when he came to deal with God, that as obedient children we may follow our father's example. God made a covenant with him by sacrifice; a heifer, a she goat and a ram were parted in the midst, and laid, each piece one against another. This careful adjustment was not without its purpose; the contracting parties on such an occasion passed between the pieces. Who then passed between them on this occasion of awful solemnity? Not Abraham; he was no contracting party: but "a smoking furnace and a burning lamp." These were the emblems respectively of the Son's bitter passion and the Father's eternal mercy. For *THEY* were the contracting parties—*contracting to each other, promising to Abraham*. As for the father of the faithful, he was content to wait humbly and reverently on, to drive away the fowls from the carcases, and thankfully to believe the promise.⁴ These high contracting parties have now fulfilled their everlasting compact. The Son of God has borne our sins; the Father has raised him from the dead, and proclaims forgiveness to the world in his name. Baptism is the seal of these acts of grace, the guarantee of these words of mercy. It is our part to listen to them, to

¹ Romans vi. 23.

² Luke xxiii. 31.

³ Romans iv. 11.

⁴ Genesis xv. 7—21.

repose on that blessed sacrifice of which they testify, and thankfully to believe that its blood of precious efficacy was shed to take away our sins. It is thus that we shall inherit the promises of Abraham's covenant, the covenant of our baptism; that covenant was and is "of faith, that it may be by grace."¹

But while we are thus receivers in the matter of salvation, there is a rendering to God again, and that gladly and cheerfully, according to the benefit done to us. This is *our part* of the baptismal covenant, and the real meaning of baptismal vows. They are the solemn engagement of *the saved* that they will in all things glorify their Saviour. On this point also we are instructed by the scripture before us. For we learn from it,

III. The holiness required by the gospel. We have already seen that on the occasion referred to by St. Paul, the same blood which was sprinkled on the altar to make atonement, was sprinkled also on the people, on the tabernacle and on its holy vessels, on every thing in short which had to do with the service of God. The vessels and the tabernacle to which they belonged, were by this act dedicated to God's exclusive use, and the people by the same act declared him to be their God and solemnly avouched themselves to be his obedient people. The antitype of this is in ourselves. The blood of calves and goats sprinkled on the natural Israel, sprinkled also on the vessels of service and the tabernacle, typified the sprinkling of the blood of Christ on the consciences of Christian men. St. Peter speaks of believers as "elect unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ;"² and St. Paul in this very epistle bids us "draw near to God, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience."³ The heart and conscience are thus sprinkled when we find peace with God by trusting in Christ's sacrifice. And as this can only be through the teaching of the Holy Spirit, Moses, as I conceive his meaning, took water along with the blood, and sprinkled them together on the congregation. For in the

¹ Romans iv. 16.² I Peter i. 2.³ Hebrews x. 22.

congregation when thus sprinkled we meet in type with the true Israel, the people who by the blood and Spirit of Christ have found peace of conscience and are at rest in God. Now it is with us as it was formerly with them; the blood which atones for sin and ministers peace of conscience, consecrates also to the service of God. When Israel served strange gods, they defiled their consecration. When Nehemiah found chambers prepared in the temple for Tobiah the Ammonite, he cast forth the household-stuff of the heathen as defiling the holy place.¹ And we may conceive the feelings of a Jewish high-priest if he had discovered one of the vessels of the ministry in the dwelling of a private Israelite, and seen it used as a common drinking cup. He would have exclaimed in astonishment and horror, *behold the consecrating blood!* Belshazzar the king of Babylon was guilty of this profanation, and the fearful writing on the wall was the immediate judgment on his impiety.² Now this consecrating blood is upon us when we find peace in the blood of Jesus. And if we open our blood-sprinkled hearts to another than the God of peace, and yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, we defile our consecration, we "defile the temple of God,"³ we provoke that judgment which destroyed the king of Babylon. Let us seek to dwell then under the shadow of the cross. So shall the love of Christ constrain us to live not to ourselves but to Him. And ever beholding there as in a glass, the glory of the Lord, we shall be changed into the same image, being made merciful as he is merciful, and taught to love our enemies, to bless them that curse, and to do good to them that hate us. Our peace and holiness shall thus advance together, proceeding from the same cross, from the faith which embraces one crucified Redeemer. And if we know our inability to keep that Redeemer in constant remembrance, let us bless God that water is mingled with the blood; that he whom we serve is able to wash our hearts from wickedness and to make us his holy people. For though we cannot keep God's law perfectly as a covenant

¹ Nehemiah xiii. 7—9.² Daniel v. 1—5.³ 1 Corinthians iii. 17.

of salvation, we shall be enabled by his grace who is the Mediator of a better covenant, to make it the rule of our hearts and lives: and strengthened now by him to go on our way rejoicing, we shall be brought at last to that "eternal inheritance" which he is gone into heaven to prepare. The saints of the former Covenant looked for it in their day, and the de cease accomplished at Jerusalem, has now secured them in the possession of their hope. The same de cease is our security if our trust is in the same Saviour. Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy, he saveth both us and them. To his name be glory for ever!

The Reader's attention is particularly requested to Appendix, Note I.

LECTURE XVI.

Hebrews ix. 23—28.

"It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us: nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high-priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation."

THE argument of the Apostle proceeds. He seems to have been afraid that the Hebrews might admit his premises while some among them found an apology for denying his conclusion, and so stopped short of acknowledgment of the Lord Jesus. We allow, these might have said, that death was the sanction of the covenant which God made with our fathers at Sinai. But the very sacrifices of which you remind us, have met and fulfilled that sanction; the broken law of Moses has been honoured in the slaughtered victims of fifteen hundred years. These sacrifices were appointed by God himself; we cannot doubt their efficacy for the

purpose for which he designed them ; we therefore rest in this Divine appointment and look for no other offering. You say the truth, my brethren, answers the Apostle ; the sacrifices of our law were appointed by God, and were efficacious for the end for which he designed them. But they were designed to purify "the patterns of things in the heavens," not "the heavenly things themselves." Now the High-Priest of whom I have just been discoursing to you, has entered not into the pattern and figure but into the reality, "into heaven itself," and into the presence of God. And to prepare that sanctuary for us that we should abide in it for ever, demands "better sacrifices" than those of bulls and goats. They were the types ; but Jesus, God's slain lamb, is the antitype. Our high-priest enters into the holy place *every year* with blood *not his own*, and comes forth continually from that sanctuary to make fresh atonements for the congregation. But Christ has appeared *once* to put away sin by the sacrifice of *himself*, and shall not come forth again from those heavens which have now received him till the day of final judgment and of salvation to his waiting people.

It is not necessary to dwell on the text further in its particular application to the Hebrews. We may proceed at once to unfold its catholic meaning, as it applied to them in their day, as it applies to us in ours.

Three subjects of consideration are brought under our notice by the language which the Apostle employs.

We are led to consider *first*, what "the heavenly things themselves" are, what their purification is, and what are the means of this purification. We are led to consider *second*, the efficacy and excellence of the purifying sacrifice. And our attention is drawn in the *third* place, to that great event which shall be at once the salvation of his people and the destruction of his enemies, the reappearing of the Saviour-Judge from those heavens which now conceal him from our sight.

I. For the elucidation of the first of these important subjects, let us read again—

It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.

What "the heavenly things themselves" here mentioned really are, is explained to us by their "patterns." These were the "the people," the "tabernacle," and "the vessels of the ministry." The tabernacle was a figure, as is expressly declared, of God's true dwelling-place above; while the vessels which were in it and the people also were, figures of God's true Israel, the people who are consecrated to his service, and who shall be found hereafter in the tabernacle "not made with hands," "vessels unto honour meet for the Master's use."¹ These heavenly things, St. Paul tells us, required to be purified. It was necessary that heaven should be made meet for us; it was necessary also that we should be made meet for heaven. Christ's sacrifice and intercession, we are told, have accomplished both these objects. Let us consider this particularly.

To purify, may mean without impropriety, to preserve from what would defile. In this sense it is evidently applied to heaven; it requires no argument to shew that the dwelling place of the holy One is pure. But our presence would have defiled it, for we have sinned. Christ has therefore shed his blood and carried it into heaven, and appears in the presence of God for us, that when we follow and for ever abide with him there, it may be no dishonour to that holy sanctuary. It is the glory of a royal court that to be presented and received at it is the stamp of purity, declaring the person who is so privileged to be without taint, may to be above suspicion. Surely the same thing is true of the court of the King of kings! And if it is the dishonour of an earthly court that no such distinctions are made, surely it must have dishonoured heaven if the impure and the

¹ II. Timothy ii. 21.

pure, the sinful and the sinless had been permitted with the same freedom, to have entered within its sacred precincts. It would have dishonoured it by tarnishing the glory of its Sovereign, for it would have declared to the whole unfallen creation that he had relaxed in his love of righteousness and had begun to connive at sin. And when therefore it was determined that the everlasting doors of the palace of the Eternal should be opened to sinful man, Christ came forth from within it, and taking on him the transgressions of the guilty, bare them "in his own body on the tree." He also on behalf of the unrighteous, fulfilled the whole righteousness of the law. And having done these things, he has gone up on high "now to appear in the presence of God for us." His appearance there is on our behalf and also on God's behalf. It is a continual testimony to his finished work, it puts God in continual remembrance of our claim to be admitted after him. The Son of God in human form with pierced hands and feet is also an eternal testimony to all the inhabitants of heaven, that though once-guilty man be found in his holy presence, God still loves and requires righteousness, God still hates and curses sin. This is the cleansing of the upper sanctuary, the purification of the true tabernacle by the better and perfect sacrifice.

But to purify, in its natural and proper sense, means to cleanse from some defilement already contracted. And in this sense, I need not say, it applies to us; we have contracted the defilement of sin and need therefore to be cleansed before we are meet either for God's service on earth, or for seeing his face in heaven. "What is man," Scripture asks, "that he should be clean? and he which is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" It then describes him as "abominable and filthy," drinking "iniquity like water."¹ But though this is the natural condition even of God's people, they are described in the text as "heavenly things;" they are destined for heaven, they are "vessels of mercy, afore prepared unto glory."² And he who has set such a destiny before them, is able to prepare them for it.

¹ Job xv. 14, 16.

² Romans ix. 23.

He is able to answer his own question, to take up his own challenge, to do that which to all save himself is impossible, —to cleanse abominable and filthy man, and to make him meet for the upper sanctuary. This cleansing, the text tells us, is effected through the better sacrifice and prevalent intercession of Christ. And if we observe the type closely, we cannot fail to understand the antitype; it was brought under our notice indeed in the immediately-preceding lecture. The burnt-offerings which, as we then saw, Moses presented on behalf of the congregation, obtained for them the pardon of ceremonial guilt. And the blood of these sacrifices, when sprinkled on the people with water, cleansed them from ceremonial defilement; it cleansed also the vessels of the ministry. The people were from that moment God's holy congregation, and priestly ministry was accepted on their behalf; their vessels were also holy, and might be used in the service of him who dwelt between the cherubim. All this is a pattern of God's way with his people now. Remission of sin has been obtained for those who trust in it, through the blood of Christ, the great, the better sacrifice. And when the Divine love and mercy revealed in him are shed abroad in the heart and conscience by the Holy Ghost, they cleanse that conscience from the sense of guilt and that heart from the love of sin. Holy confidence takes the place of bondage to fear; holy affection makes us weep over our former alienation and dislike. We are drawn to God through Christ, crying Abba Father, and that filial cry is answered through his prevalent intercession, by the Holy Ghost sent down on us in larger measure from on high. We thus find strength to delight ourselves in God, strength for fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ, strength to keep his holy commandments and to walk continually in his blessed ways. This is the true cleansing, the cleansing which enabling us to serve God now, shall prepare us to serve him for ever. It is a cleansing indeed, for it brings us into a new state, a new judicial and a new moral state. Instead of condemnation there is acceptance; instead of the guilty conscience, the black and dark heart, there is peace

and love and holiness. For "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."¹ The foulest stain of sin is not beyond its wondrous efficacy. The Corinthians had been thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers and extortioners, nay they had been fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate and abusers of themselves with mankind, But from all this they had been cleansed; "ye are washed," St. Paul tells them, "ye are sanctified, ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God."² The true blood had "justified," the true water had "washed" them, the blood and water together had "sanctified" them for the service of God. And they were prepared by this heavenly cleansing, as the language of the Apostle implies, to "inherit the kingdom of God." This then, I repeat, is the twofold efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ. It prepares heaven for us and us for heaven: it provides on the one hand, that heaven shall not be dishonoured by our presence; it provides on the other, that we shall be meet for its society and its eternal glories.

II. The Hebrews must have been aware that the blood of bulls and goats could not minister this cleansing, and that its efficacy was for the flesh only. To shew this more clearly and to lead them to consider in contrast, the efficacy and excellence of the sacrifice of Christ, St. Paul proceeds,—

Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others; for then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the DISPENSATIONS hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

Do not draw the parallel too closely, says St. Paul in these words, between our legal high-priest and him of whom I am now speaking. Our high-priest enters into

¹ II Corinthians v. 17.

² I Corinthians vi. 9—11.

the holy place every year with blood not his own. His sacrifices are thus repeated, partly because they are inefficacious, and partly because the victims are worthless. They cannot put away sin, and therefore require to be repeated; it is also possible to repeat them as long as the land of Israel produces bulls and goats. With Christ however it is the very reverse; by the sacrifice of himself offered once in the end of the world he hath put away sin. He was offered but once, because the efficacy of his sacrifice is such that it needs no repetition. It is also too excellent to be repeated; there are many bulls and goats, there is only one Son of God. It is not possible that he should have suffered often since the foundation of the world; he could die but once. Our high-priest is continually coming out of the holy place in search of fresh victims, acknowledging by the very act that his object is unattained, that he has not been able to reconcile God and man. But Christ abides in that holy place whither he is gone; and the very fact of his doing so declares that his object is accomplished, that the reconciliation is perfected, that sin is put away. This argument is greatly strengthened by the literal rendering given above,—"now once in the end of the dispensations hath he appeared." For St. Paul by this language carries the thoughts of the Hebrews back to the beginning of time. He reminds them that under all the previous dispensations of the world sacrifices had been offered to God. They were offered by Abel, under the first dispensation; by Noah, under the second; by Abraham, under the third; and by the sons of Aaron, under that dispensation which the Hebrews especially venerated. These sacrifices, the Apostle would say to them, appointed by God himself, testified that if man was to be saved, his sin required to be atoned for; but they testified also by the very fact of their repetition, that *they* were not able to atone for it. And when both these things had been demonstrated by God's dealings with mankind under four distinct dispensations of his grace, the one efficacious and excellent sacrifice appeared and was offered in the end of them. We witness now therefore, he

concludes, the consummation of the Divine counsel, the perfect accomplishment of all which is needful for man's salvation, prefigured also, as it has been, since the world began.

Let us now pause and consider these things for our own edification and comfort. There is a most wonderful depth of meaning in the expression "to put away sin." Sin is that accursed thing which coming between the Creator and the creature, has been since it entered the world, the undivided cause of all the Creator's dishonour and all the creature's woe. To put it away is to remove the root of bitterness, to bring the Creator and his creature together again as if nothing had ever parted them. And it is because the sacrifice of Christ is able to do this that it is called the atonement, i.e. the at-one-ment, that which sets God and man at one. I have already remarked many times that in doing this its blessed work, that sacrifice in its wondrous efficacy looked back as well as forward. This appears distinctly in the words before us. "He hath appeared in the end of the dispensations," we read, looking back to their beginning; "he hath appeared" but "once," looking forward to the end. The saints who lived before his advent, had not our privileges; the making an end of sin was in their days a subject of prophecy, a future blessing.¹ Their condition was one of expectation; "as for our transgressions," they said, "thou shalt purge them away."² When they left this world and passed into the disembodied state, that expectation was exchanged for joyful assurance and blessed hope. But the mercy for which they hoped, was still future; there was still something to hinder their consummated and perfect felicity. We need not wonder then that Moses and Elias when permitted to converse with Jesus, "spake of HIS DECEASE;"³ it was the great event on which all their hopes depended. And when it was known in the invisible world that this decease was really accomplished, the spirits of these just men and of their fellows were "made perfect"⁴ by the

¹ Daniel ix. 24.² Psalms lxxv. 3.³ Luke ix. 31.⁴ Hebrews xii. 23.

joyful intelligence, it removed the last lingering hindrance to perfected felicity, perfected rest in God. And the same sacrifice which perfected their joy, is proclaimed to us in the gospel that our joy also may be full. This is most beautifully expressed by St. Paul in another place. "Jesus Christ," he tells the Romans, "was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers, and that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy."¹ Let us mark in these words the twofold purpose of his advent. He came to fulfil those promises of mercy on which the saints who lived before him had depended; he came that we who should live after him, and who are equally interested in these promises, might rejoice in that fulfilment. In being told then of "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world,"² we hear that very gospel on earth which comforts the spirits of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob in heaven. And its "good tidings of great joy" which the angel declared should be "to all people,"³ are that God having accepted the sacrifice of his Son, is well-pleased, through that sacrifice, to remit iniquity and not to impute sin. We are therefore made welcome to draw nigh to him, as truly and heartily welcome as if sin had never parted us from his embrace. "Come unto me," is his invitation; "I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you," is his assurance; "and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty,"⁴ is the word of further, blessed encouragement which has proceeded from the lips of eternal truth. The gates of heaven are thus thrown open, and whosoever will may enter in.

Let us take heed however that we do not misapprehend this truth. The gospel does not proclaim that God is accessible in any way in which man may please to approach him; it does not give to us the liberty of rushing into his presence uncleaned in conscience and in heart. The foolish shall not stand in his sight; but "as for me," says the Psalmist, "I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy;

¹ Romans xv. 8, 9.

² John i. 29.

³ Luke ii. 10.

⁴ Isaiah lv. 3. II Corinthians vi. 17, 18.

and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.”¹ God gave a most remarkable proof of this in his dealings with the two sons of Adam. They both came to him and presented their offerings; but Cain came in a way of his own choosing, whilst Abel looked by faith to the Messiah.² And Cain was in consequence rejected, whilst Abel was accepted. But though Cain was rejected he was not excluded; the Lord condescended to assure him that if he did well, i.e. if he came as his brother had come, he should surely be accepted like his brother.³ And the case is the same still. Sin is put away; it is no longer a judicial barrier in man's way to God; the remembrance of his sins and the knowledge of his sinfulness need not discourage any man from approaching. But he must approach in God's way, and that way is Christ; “no man,” says the Saviour, “cometh unto the Father, but by me.”⁴ To put us more fully in possession of this, let us refer again to the type. When Moses had offered the burnt-offerings on behalf of the congregation, he took a bunch of hyssop and sprinkled them with the blood. And being cleansed by that sprinkling, they were accepted by the Lord in the worship and service which they rendered to him. Now Christ is the true Moses, and the holy ministry is the bunch of hyssop in his hand. He commands them to testify that all are ruined by transgression, and in danger of eternal wrath as its most righteous wages. He commands them to testify further, that he has loved and given himself for all, that the Father has accepted his sacrifice, and that through that sacrifice he is well-pleased to forgive iniquity. Let this blood sprinkle our consciences. Let us receive in other words, these humbling declarations of the gospel. While they abase us on the one hand, let them pacify our consciences on the other; and filled with the confidence which they minister, let us draw nigh to God, thankfully accepting his mercy. We shall find no bar in our way; if we seek him thus, he will assuredly be found of us. And we shall know

¹ Psalm v. 5, 7.² Hebrews xi. 4.³ Genesis iv. 7.⁴ John xiv. 6.

that it is so by his love shed abroad in our hearts, by the spiritual strength which he ministers to us that we may love his name and walk in his commandments, and by that holy fellowship with himself, which is a foretaste on earth of the eternal joy of heaven. We are greatly hindered, it is true, in this enjoyment now. But this is not because the sacrifice of Christ is imperfect; it is not because there is any thing on God's part to hinder us from always delighting in him; it is because we have still an evil heart, and carry about with us a body of sin. The day however is at hand when we shall drop this body in the grave and leave this heart behind us, when we who have believed on Christ on earth shall be translated to that holy sanctuary which he has gone to prepare for us in heaven. Then shall we know the perfection of his sacrifice, then shall we find indeed that there is nothing between us and our God. It is not merely that sin itself shall be found to have been put away, the very remembrance of it shall be gone. The words of the Apocalypse, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes,"¹ are a most consoling proof of this. We ask as we read them, can there be tears in heaven? If tears could be shed in that place of joy, they would be the tears of the blessed over their past sins. And we can well conceive such tears to be shed. We can conceive Noah in the full enjoyment of God's eternal goodness, to look back on his drunkenness and weep; we can conceive David to look back with the same feelings on his adultery, St. Peter on his denial of his Master, St. Paul on his persecution of the Church. But God will not permit them to do so, he will wipe away the tears. Their sins have passed from his mind, he has said, "I will remember them no more;" and they must pass from their minds also. Transgression has no memorial in heaven; it is a thing put away, its very name has perished. And there being nothing on God's part to hinder his love from flowing forth upon his children, and nothing on their part to keep them back from receiving it, their joy shall indeed be full. He will comfort them, the prophet tells us, "as one whom

¹ Revelation vii. 17.

his mother comforteth,"¹ and they shall be conscious for ever, to the blessedness of His parental embrace. How wondrous must be the efficacy of that one sacrifice which has thus opened the bosom of infinite purity and made it a resting-place for sinful man! Its efficacy is in proportion to its excellence; it is the sacrifice of the Son of God.

III. We must now follow St. Paul's argument to its conclusion. He would afford to the Hebrews further proof of the oneness of this sacrifice, and also instruct them from the types of their own law, to look for the re-appearing, in due time, of that glorious High-Priest who had offered it. He therefore proceeds—

And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment: so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without a SIN-OFFERING unto salvation.

You are aware, my brethren, he would say to them, that "it is appointed unto men once to die," for a man can resign his life but once. And if Christ be a man, the same rule applies to him; when he came "to bear the sins of many," he could be offered only once. But do not suppose that because he will not re-appear like your high-priest, that he may offer fresh sacrifices, the heavens have on that account received him for ever. For as there is one judgment which shall succeed death and fix every man's eternal state, and as that judgment is committed to him, he shall surely appear again in the Father's appointed season, for the destruction of his enemies and the salvation of his waiting people. This then is the appearing, St. Paul would say, for which you must look, the appearing of your Saviour "without a sin-offering," i. e. not for the purpose of sacrifice, but to receive you to himself for ever.

These verses are full at once of needful warning and of blessed consolation. We are reminded that death awaits

¹ Isaiah lxvi. 13,

every one of us, but we are reminded at the same time that Jesus has died. It is declared that judgment shall follow death, but it is declared at the same time that to them that look for him, Jesus shall appear the second time not as a Judge but as a Saviour. Both death and judgment are thus deprived of their terrors, and the believer can say with confidence of being heard, "in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment, good Lord, deliver me."

It requires no proof that we must all die; that this earthly house of our tabernacle, so wonderfully constructed by the hand of Omnipotence, must one day be taken down. In the expressive language of the royal preacher, "the silver cord" must "be loosed," and "the golden bowl be broken," "the pitcher" must "be broken at the fountain," and "the wheel broken at the cistern;" "the dust" must "return to the earth as it was, and the spirit unto God who gave it."¹ Such a prospect apart from Christ, would indeed be full of terror. For this dread sentence on humanity is the expression of Divine wrath for sin, and it were "a fearful thing" at the awful moment of its execution, "to fall into the hands of the living God." Hence the unspeakable bitterness of death; "its STING is sin."² But Christ has plucked out this sting, for he "was once offered to bear the sins of many," and God has declared the forgiveness of all trespasses to those who trust in that perfect sacrifice. Death does not therefore come to such as the expression of Divine wrath; it does not come to usher their spirits into the presence of an angry God. It is sent by him who has forgiven them, to take down their sin-polluted tabernacle, that the spirit which has been long hindered by it in the service of God, may flit into freedom and ascend to unrestrained communion with the Father of spirits above. And knowing that this is the true character of death, the believer on Christ is not afraid to meet it. He feels indeed like other men, the bodily anguish and sinking of nature which accompanies it; he is conscious in common with all, of the rudeness of that dreadful wrench which tears the

¹ Ecclesiastes xii. 6, 7.

² I Corinthians xv. 56.

spirit and the flesh asunder. But even in the midst of this tremendous experience he is preserved in peace; and when conscious that he is just about to bid adieu to earth he can say with St. Stephen, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."¹

We are also reminded in the text that judgment shall follow death; that when the spirit shall return to God who gave it, our state shall be fixed for ever. This is a prospect more appalling even than death; for if God shall lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet, and deal with us according to our merits, we cannot stand before him. But the believer declines judgment and appeals to grace. "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, O Lord," is his prayer, "for in thy sight shall no man living be justified."² And God permits him to decline it, for St. Paul declares in the words before us that to them that look for him Christ will appear the second time, not as a Judge but as a Saviour. These words carry the mind forward to the end of time, shewing that St. Paul meant to refer, not only to the Divine decision on the eternal state of each individual which shall immediately succeed death, but to the manifestation also of the righteousness of that decision in the day of general judgment. But this makes no difference, for that which shall give confidence when the disembodied spirit is conscious to the overwhelming presence of God, shall give confidence also when Christ shall appear in his glory. There is only one position of safety in reference to either of these awful events; only one thing which can minister confidence to us in either of these tremendous hours; and it is plainly declared in the text. The language of St. Paul is borrowed from the usages of the tabernacle. When the high-priest had offered his sacrifice on the great day of atonement, he went into the holiest to present its blood, and the whole congregation remained in prayer without, waiting for his coming forth again. And after a time he did come forth and lifted up his hands and blessed them. Christ our great High-Priest, has in like manner offered his one perfect

¹ Acts vii. 59.² Psalm cxlvi. 2.

sacrifice, and gone into heaven the true holiest, to present his atoning blood. But these heavens have received him only "till the time of restitution of all things," when God "shall send" him forth again to bless his waiting people.¹ He will raise in that day the bodies of his sleeping saints, and changing those who shall be found alive into the likeness of his glory, he will gather to himself, without losing one, all who have trusted in his salvation since the world began. To be of that waiting people then is our position of safety. Let us be found trusting unfeignedly in the one perfect sacrifice, confiding in the eternal mercy of which it is the pledge, and looking for the re-appearing of our High-Priest. He will not, he cannot make us ashamed of this confidence; whether our spirits go to him by death, or we are found on the earth at the dreadful day of his coming, he will receive us to himself as our God and Saviour.

And in thus dealing with his people at last, God shall deal righteously; he is "a just God and a Saviour."² We have seen that his people decline judgment; we are told elsewhere that they "shall stand in the judgment,"³ and both statements are true. A king proclaims pardon to a rebellious province and calls on its inhabitants to lay down their arms. He afterwards comes into that province, attended by the power of his kingdom, and his once-rebellious people confiding in his amnesty, receive him with joy. If any of them is called then to account for his rebellion and placed at the bar of judgment, he pleads, in arrest of judgment, the proclamation of the king. And his plea must be allowed. It is not grace which allows it, it is righteousness; grace spake the word of mercy but righteousness performs it. Christ in like manner shall yet come to the world as the Judge of quick and dead. But a message of mercy has preceded him, and God is now calling on us to confide in that message, to lay down the weapons of our rebellion, and to look for his coming with joy. It is impossible in the righteousness of God that those who do so unfeignedly can be called to account for their sins. They cannot but stand in

¹ Acts iii. 20, 21.² Isaiah xlv. 21.³ Psalm i. 5. I John iv. 17.

the judgment, because he fulfils the word on which he has caused them to hope, and enters not into judgment with them. But in the exercise of the same righteousness he will enter into judgment with all others. Those who have said that they could justify themselves shall then be called on to make good their boasting; they shall be tried by the law and condemned. And those who have heard of Christ's dying love, and have still continued enemies to him in their minds by wicked works, who have heard of the perfect sacrifice which has opened the holiest, and have still continued far away, shall be punished in that righteousness, "with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power."¹ Let no man deceive himself by hoping for mercy in that day. This and this only is the day of mercy; it must be received now if we would possess it then. Our High-Priest comes in that day "without a sin-offering," and there is therefore no possibility of further mercy being shewn.

Let us now in conclusion, review the contents of the text. It reveals to us the past, the present, and the future. It takes us first to Calvary and points to the perfect sacrifice offered once for all. It then carries us into heaven and reveals to us him who offered it, preparing by his presence and ceaseless intercession that holy sanctuary for his people's eternal abode. It shews what he is now doing on earth; that he is pacifying the consciences and cleansing the hearts of his people by the blood of the same sacrifice which is presented on their behalf on high. It discovers also the character and present position of the believing Church of God; that they are "praying without" whilst incense is thus offered within, waiting for the re-appearing of their High-Priest.² And it tells us finally that he shall re-appear in answer to their longing expectation. All this, I need not say, is in most beautiful harmony with his own word. "I go," he said, "to prepare a place for you; and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to myself; that were I am, there ye may be also."³

¹ II Thessalonians i. 9.² Luke i. 10. 21.³ John xiv. 2, 3.

What shall we say then to these things? Truly in following the Apostle through this and similar descriptions of heavenly wonders, one feels constrained to acknowledge with the great master of English song—

“Into the Heaven of Heavens I have presumed
An earthly guest and drawn empyreal air.”

May God of his mercy grant that it may make us sensible of the gross and dark atmosphere of this present evil world, and may raise our affections to that place of purity which is reserved as the inheritance of the just!

LECTURE XVII.

Hebrews x. 1—9.

“For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: in burnt-offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt-offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not; neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.”

IN the immediately-preceding context which we considered in the last lecture, St. Paul has reminded the Hebrews that the sacrifices of their high-priests were often repeated, whilst the sacrifice of Christ had been offered once for all. He has also referred briefly to the inefficacy of the legal sacrifices and the efficacy of the sacrifice of Christ as the reason of this difference. In the verses which we have read now, he enlarges on these topics. He proves the

inutility of the legal sacrifices both from the reason of the case and from the Old Testament-Scriptures ; and demonstrates by a reference to the same inspired authority, that the perfect sacrifice of Messiah was designed from the beginning to supersede them.

A brief paraphrase of his words will put us in possession of the Apostle's argument, so far as the Hebrews were concerned. You are aware, my brethren, he would say to them, that your law prescribes many sacrifices, and commands in particular that on each yearly returning day of atonement, one of peculiar value be offered for all the congregation. It does so, because presenting only an imperfect sketch of the good things which were to be revealed after it, and not containing even a full representation of them, it never was able, and is not now able, to minister peace of conscience to those who approach unto God. You may learn this from the very reason of the case. If these sacrifices really were able to pacify the conscience, would they not, I ask you, have long since ceased to be offered ? Unquestionably they would ; the worshippers having found in them once for all, the assurance of Divine mercy, should never have been troubled with conscience of sin again. But these sacrifices have the very opposite effect ; they bring sin afresh to remembrance every year, and renew the sense of guilt. They remind us that we have sinned, but cannot tell that we are forgiven. It is impossible that the worthless blood of bulls and goats should procure for us eternal mercy. You may think me, the Apostle continues, a blasphemer of God and of Moses for speaking thus, but listen to your own Messiah. Speaking in the fortieth Psalm, and contemplating his advent, he declares that the Father had prepared for him a body, because he did not desire the continuance of sacrifices, and had no pleasure in burnt-offerings. And entering into the Father's mind, Messiah adds, "Lo, I come to do thy will, O God." Let us mark these words. In saying, first that God had no pleasure in the burnt-offerings and sacrifices which the law prescribed, and then that he came to do God's will, Messiah

evidently meant to declare that the one great sacrifice of himself was in due time to supersede the legal offerings. That precious body which was prepared by the Holy Ghost is therefore now our sacrifice instead of bulls and goats.

This argument is greatly strengthened by the parenthesis which occurs in the midst of it. When Christ, as his words are here quoted by St. Paul, speaks of coming into the world to do God's will, he adds, "in the volume of the book it is written of me." Now the fortieth Psalm is ascribed to David, and in his days no sacred book was extant except the books of Moses. This quotation therefore declared to the Hebrews that these books testified to Christ, and declared it too on the authority of Christ himself. It seconded his word to their unbelieving countrymen "if ye had believed Moses, ye would have believed me, for he wrote of me."¹ It reminded them that those ordinances which they esteemed perfect, were declared in their own Scriptures to be only types and figures, and that Moses, in enacting them, was thinking of something better, even of Messiah their glorious fulfilment, that very Messiah, adds St. Paul, whom I now preach unto you.

Such is the argument of our text. It brings before us in a very striking point of view one subject of the utmost importance which we partially considered in the last lecture, the taking away of sin. The blood of bulls and goats, we are told, could not effect this; the blood of Christ has effected it. Now we pray continually "O Lamb of God, that takest away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace;" and we cannot do wrong in seeking to understand the meaning of our own words. Let us inquire therefore what the taking away of sin is, why the blood of bulls and goats could not accomplish it, and what it is which gives to the blood of Jesus its mysterious, expiatory power? Having endeavoured to find a satisfactory answer to these most important questions, I shall then shew to you, from the text, first, that the sacrifice of Christ, because it has accomplished this blessed object, ministers peace of conscience for ever;

¹ John v. 46.

and, second, that from its very nature such a sacrifice admits not of repetition.

God solemnly prohibited the children of Israel from taking any satisfaction for the life of a murderer. "Blood," said his enactment, "defileth the land: and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein, but by the blood of him that shed it."¹ This may enable us to understand the taking away of sin. If a foul murder is committed in any land, the opprobrium of the bloody deed attaches itself, at first, to the murderer. But if he is known to be such, and yet goes in and out among his fellow citizens without any one shunning his society, and without any officer of justice laying hands on him, the opprobrium of his crime attaches itself, after a while, to the people among whom he dwells; they are considered as a nation of murderers. The judges of Israel were therefore commanded in such circumstances, to shew their abhorrence of the crime by shedding the blood of the criminal. And it was only when they had done so, that, in the language of the law of Moses, expiation was made for the land.² Let us apply this principle to the Divine government. When man first became a transgressor, the foul opprobrium attached to himself only. But if God had suffered that transgression to pass unvisited, if man had been permitted to go in and out before him, and had been loaded as before, with his benefits, the Divine character would immediately have been implicated, and the creature would have escaped the deserved penalty of his sin at the eternal expense of the honour of the creature's God. And as therefore in every well-ordered commonwealth, the death of the criminal is necessary to clear the nation's character, so by the law of God the eternal death of the sinner was declared to be necessary, to clear the character of that pure and holy Being who created him, not for sin, but for his service and glory. If this dreadful sentence had been executed, all mankind must have perished. God said however that it should not be executed, that man should not perish, but should have eternal life. He said at the

¹ Numbers xxxv. 31, 33. ² Numbers xxxv. 31, 33. Marginal reading.

same time, that his name should not be dishonoured, that while the sinning creature should be saved and blessed eternally, he should be glorified in blessing him. But how were these contraries to meet? How was the salvation of the sinner ever to be made to harmonize with the glory of his holy Creator? That which is able to harmonize them, takes away sin. For sin is the hindrance to man being saved and blessed consistently with the honour of God; and whatever therefore so clears the Divine character of all connivance at iniquity as to enable him, without dishonour, to bid the sinner live, takes away iniquity and expiates transgression. This explains to us at once why the blood of bulls and goats could not accomplish this blessed object. "It is not possible" that it should do so, says St. Paul; and reason as well as Scripture proclaims the sentiment to be just. Whole hecatombs of these worthless animals were insufficient, nay were utterly without power to proclaim God's abhorrence of sin and to manifest him to Creation as the Holy One and the Just. The Saviour therefore, when coming into the world, put them all aside, and said "Lo I come, to do thy will, oh God." That will was that he should obey the law in its precept, and bear on man's behalf, its threatened penalty. He did both these things; he "was obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."¹ And by this twofold work, his work of doing and dying, as the divines of a former age were accustomed to call it, he has enabled God, without dishonour to himself, to bid the sinner live; he has taken away sin.

This deeply-interesting subject demands a fuller elucidation. Man was created at first in the image of God; and the perfect law of love was written on his heart. Love to God will necessarily shew itself in obedience; and man was therefore forbidden, as a test of his love, to eat of the fruit of a certain tree in the garden. In testimony also to the perfect reasonableness of what was thus enjoined, death was denounced as the assured penalty of transgression. Our first father violated this prohibition, and broke loose in doing so

¹ Philippians ii. 8.

from his allegiance to God. And his posterity inheriting from him a heart of disobedience, have followed his evil course in all their successive generations. Now there are two ways in which this dreadful breach between the Creator and his creatures might have been healed. The lawgiver might have declined to execute the sentence of the law for the past, and might have relaxed its requirements to suit man's depraved taste for the future. But such an act on God's part was impossible. It would have saved man indeed; but it would have saved him, as I have already remarked, at the expense of the glory of God. It would have been an open acknowledgement on God's part that the law which he had given was unreasonably strict and severe, and that the sanction which he had annexed to it was unjust and cruel. It would have been an acknowledgement moreover, that in having given such a law, and having annexed such a sanction, he was worthy of blame; and that man who had violated the one and despised the other, was justified in the part which he had acted. In whatever way therefore man was to be saved, it could not be in this way; God could make no concessions. It was incumbent on him to make openly manifest that his law was the perfection of justice, and that the death which he had denounced against the breakers of it was only the righteous penalty of sin. Nor was this all; it was necessary also that man the sinner should acknowledge these things to be true. It was necessary that he should fulfil the righteousness of that law on which he had trampled, and make confession on his bended knees, that the death which he had drawn down on himself, was his justly-deserved doom. It was in this way only that the breach could be healed, by man yielding to God, and not God to man. And in this way it was healed; for all this was accomplished in the work of our Divine Redeemer.

It is an easy task to shew this. "When the fulness of the time was come," St. Paul says, "God sent forth HIS SON, made of a woman, MADE UNDER THE LAW."¹ The Son of God, of whom St. Paul here speaks, was the giver

¹ Galatians iv. 4.

of the law. And when man broke loose from its obligations, he accused this Divine lawgiver of severity, of harshness and of injustice. To wipe off this imputation, and to vindicate the honour of his holy name, HE, THE LAWGIVER was made under his own law, and dwelt for three and thirty years in the world, fulfilling all its righteousness. What a marvellous vindication of God's dealings with man was here! What a wondrous spectacle to the angels who ministered to him must have been this obedience of incarnate Deity!—what a grateful sight to the eternal Father who had sent him! And it teaches to us the sons of men a lesson of the deepest interest and value. He whom in our wickedness we had called a harsh and severe Lawgiver is revealed to us in his life in flesh, bound with his own bonds, and fulfilling his own precepts. The Pharisees bound heavy burdens and grievous to be borne and laid them on men's shoulders, whilst they themselves would not touch them with one of their fingers.¹ But no one who recognizes in the carpenter's lowly and obedient son the thundering lawgiver of Sinai, can bring this charge against God, can deny that the law which he has given, is holy and just and good. It is precisely because it is so, that, as he has himself assured us, "it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail."² Its honour could not be sacrificed, even to save man from ruin. And rather than that it should be sacrificed, Almighty God descended from heaven to keep it.

Something more however required to be done. Man had subjected himself by sin to death as the penalty of the law. This penalty had been annexed to testify God's abhorrence of sin, and could not therefore be remitted. But Divine wisdom devised a way in which that abhorrence of sin could be manifested without the death of the guilty, and Divine love provided a surety on whom the tempest of his wrath might fall. That way was not through animal sacrifice; bulls and goats were not the sureties which that love provided. Though God had slain the whole animal family and spared them not, though every mountain and forest had

¹ Matthew xxiii 4.² Luke xvi. 17.

been drained of their tenants to furnish forth one hecatomb, it would have been no demonstration of his abhorrence of sin, since by a word of his mouth he could have repaired the destruction which he had caused. But he who can thus call creatures into being at his will, has only one Son, and that Son was the surety whom his love provided. Jesus became the representative of the guilty, and was hanged on a tree, hanged as one accursed in the sight of heaven and earth. He drank the bitter cup of death, suffering both in body and in spirit all that is signified by that fearful word. While the pains of bodily death were aggravated by insult and shame, his soul was forsaken of God and was distracted by the terrors of his wrath, those dreadful terrors in which eternal death consists. The waves and billows which then passed over him, would have overwhelmed the most exalted creature: it was through the Divinity of his person alone that he was able to buffet aside the dark waters, and to rise from beneath their pressure. And by putting such a cup into his hand, by not sparing him when he stood as the Surety of the guilty, God testified as by nothing else he could have testified, that sin was the object of his eternal malediction, and that he had not repented of that word which had constituted death its penalty. The everlasting destruction of the whole human family would have been a demonstration powerless in comparison. We read of a monarch in ancient times who, to check the crime of adultery, enacted that the adulterer should lose his eyes. The first that became amenable to the statute, was his own son. The monarch felt at once as a lawgiver and as a father; he determined to uphold his law, he longed to save his son. He therefore commanded that two eyes should be struck out; but only one of these eyes was his son's, the other was his own. Now if the original sentence had been executed, and we had seen this Prince led blindfold through the streets of his father's capital, we should have learned from the awful sight his father's abhorrence of his crime. But it would have taught us this lesson in a much more striking way, if we had seen the offending Prince with one

eye still spared to him, and if on going to court to ask the reason of this indulgence, we had been ushered into the presence of his one-eyed father. We might have gone to reproach him for not executing the sentence of his law, and for thus shewing that he was indifferent to crime when a favourite was the criminal; but the sight of his disfigured countenance, of the broken law executed on himself, would have rendered it impossible to do so. It is even so with that great act of which we are now speaking. If the whole family of Adam had been cast down to hell and shut up for ever within its dark prison-house of despair, the angels of glory would have read indeed in that awful sight their Maker's abhorrence of sin. But that lesson is written now before their eyes in much more striking characters. They see indeed unnumbered myriads of Adam's family abiding for ever in the presence of God and blessed with his paternal favour, but they see in the midst of them, "a Lamb as it had been slain."¹ That Lamb is the Lawgiver, and his pierced hands and feet proclaim for ever that though his people be saved, his law has not been dishonoured. All Heaven may read in these sacred memorials that its sentence has been executed on himself.

But this vindication of the law both in precept and penalty on the part of God, is not the only thing which constitutes atonement. *Man* had dishonoured the law, and it was necessary that *he* should honour it by fulfilling all its righteousness, before God could restore him to favour. Man had also brought down its sentence on his head, and it was necessary that his uncircumcised heart should be humbled and that he should accept the punishment of his iniquity, that he should bow at his Creator's feet and acknowledge that he had deserved his vengeance, before that vengeance could be turned away. It was necessary, in short, in order to reconciliation, that God should be glorified in the nature in which he had been dishonoured. And this also was accomplished in him whom the Father sent forth; for he was both God and man,—“God of the substance of his

¹ Revelation v. 6.

Father, begotten before the worlds, and man of the substance of his mother, born in the world." He was also "made under the law" as the representative of man. And presenting to God continually the welcome offering of clean hands and a pure heart, he glorified him on man's behalf. That law which had been outraged and trampled on by mankind in the person of the first Adam, was magnified and made honourable in him the second Adam; it was proclaimed by man, in HIS obedience to it, to be altogether holy and just and good. And being charged as the second Adam, with the sins of men, he confessed them with all their aggravations, in man's name to God; "mine iniquities" he said "have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up."¹ On his bended knees moreover in dark Gethsemane, he stretched forth man's hand to take willingly that cup of bitterness which was the righteous wages of man's transgression. And God having been thus glorified in the nature which had done him shame, proclaimed himself at peace with man and accessible as a reconciled Father.

If this view of atonement be correct, we learn from it the necessity of two natures meeting in the Saviour. If he had been merely the Son of God, he could not have atoned for our sins; there would have been in his work no justifying of God on our part, no acknowledgment of his righteousness. And he could have prevailed still less to do so, if he had been merely the Son of man. His work would in that case, have contained no testimony on God's part, either to the righteousness of the law or to the justice of its awful sanction. But he is "perfect God and perfect man;" and his work contains therefore the testimony at once of heaven above and earth below, to the righteousness of the law and to the justice of him who gave it. It is this twofold testimony to God which is borne by the work of Christ and the ability which it thus possesses to clear his holy character and exalt his venerable name which gives to that work its power of expiating sin. This was clearly shadowed forth under the law of Moses. God bore

¹ Psalm xl. 12.

his testimony under that law to the evil of sin, by commanding the offender to bring a sacrifice. But before the sacrifice was accepted for him, to make atonement on his behalf, he laid his hands on its head, acknowledging that he deserved to die.¹ This is one reason, I believe, why the torments of hell cannot take away sin and restore the sinner to favour. It is not merely because no amount of creature-suffering can vindicate the righteousness of God; it is also because they lack this essential element of expiation. They are the sufferings of those who blaspheme while they suffer, and contain in them no acknowledgement of the righteousness of God. Mere pain and suffering cannot take away sin. The sufferings of the Saviour took it away not merely because he was the Son of God, but because they were holy sufferings; he kissed the hand that smote him, and acknowledged the righteousness of the law under which he died.

These things may enable us to understand the effect of the work of Christ. "He suffered for sins," says St. Peter, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."² "There is one God," says St. Paul, "and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for all."³ Christ is the channel of communication between heaven and earth, between God and man; he is the true ladder of Jacob by which the blessing of heaven descends upon the earth, and by which the inhabitants of earth may ascend to seek their God. And this mediation is founded on his work of atonement; he is able thus to bring God and man together, because he "gave himself a ransom for all." "The man Christ Jesus" in glory is the representative of the human family, and the vilest of that family may therefore draw nigh to God, and may be by him accepted and blessed. It is not possible now, because God does so, to say that he is indifferent to sin, or that he has relaxed in his love of righteousness: the obedience and atoning sufferings of him who is on the right hand of the throne are an everlasting answer to all such

¹ Leviticus i. 4. iii. 2. iv. 4, 15. ² I Peter iii. 18. ³ I Timothy ii. 5, 6.

imputations. The whole human race might now be found, without reflection on his character, eternally accepted in his presence. Heaven is large enough to hold them; and "as I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth."¹ If this were indeed so, it is often answered, if God really thus loved man and had provided this salvation for him, men could not perish. But what!—if there is perdition, must the cause be found in God?—must the reason be that God does not love man? There may be another reason, and this reason alas, is the true one. God does love man, and has wrought out this great salvation for him; but man still perishes, because man hates God.

And, blessed be God, this statement is only partially true. It cannot be said that man perishes, when we know that a multitude which cannot be numbered shall be saved out of our ruined family, and that he who obeyed and died on this wretched earth, shall see in their salvation, "of the travail of his soul." They are saved by being brought unto God through him. They are led by the Spirit of Christ to put their trust in His sacrifice and perfect righteousness; and being regarded by God as one with him in whom they trust, they are graciously accepted for his sake. And this acceptance is everlasting. They shall be seen for ever by the eternal Father in Christ their Head and Surety, in whom his law was magnified, and by whose work in flesh his holy character was vindicated; they shall be permitted for ever, because of his worthiness, to dwell in the presence of the Holy One and to see his glory. But oh what lessons we learn in being thus brought to God by Christ! The sacrifice in which we trust reveals the malignity of sin; so that we are constrained to say Amen to the confession made for us on Calvary, to acknowledge that our transgressions deserve death at the hand of God. And the righteousness in which we trust reveals the beauty of holiness, so that we add our hearty Amen to the testimony borne by the whole life of Jesus, acknowledging that God's law is holy, and his commandment "holy and just and

¹ Ezekiel xviii. 32. xxxiii. 11.

good."¹ Christ teaches these lessons to his saved people, to fit them for the presence of God. None is meet to inherit life who has not been brought to confess heartily that death was his deserved doom; neither is any one meet to abide with God for ever who has not chosen his testimonies as the eternal joy of his heart. But it is all one salvation; we are taught these lessons by the same Spirit who reveals the Saviour in our hearts. Let us understand then the double aspect of the sacrifice of Christ, its aspect to the world, and its aspect to those who are saved: let us understand the words of St. Paul, when he says of "the living God" that he "is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."*

Let us fix our attention, in conclusion, on the two important truths which, as I have already mentioned, are expressly taught in the text. It teaches us in the first place, that the sacrifice of Christ, because it has prevailed to take away sin, ministers abiding and eternal peace of conscience to those who put their trust in it. One of the principal arguments of the apostle is founded on this truth. The blood of bulls and goats, he says, would have ceased to be offered if it had been able to take sin away, because the worshippers, cleansed once for all by it, should have had no more conscience of sin. Now the blood of Christ, I need not repeat, has taken sin away, and on this very ground has ceased to be offered: this argument implies therefore that those who trust in that blood are cleansed by it once for all from an evil conscience, and enter into abiding peace. This peace is found in the sacrifice itself. From the very fact of its having been provided we learn God's willingness to forgive, and when therefore we are persuaded of its efficacy we know that his forgiveness is ours. Its efficacy moreover is everlasting, and the forgiveness which it has procured is also everlasting. And in coming to God therefore through that sacrifice, we are assured of his eternal mercy and begin to serve him without fear. I am well aware that many who yet sincerely desire to be God's people, are in a very differ-

¹ Romans vii. 12.

² I Timothy iv. 10.

ent state of mind. On this most important of all subjects which can interest an immortal being, they are tossed between hope and fear. Sometimes they trust that God is at peace with them, at other times they fear that he is not; sometimes they are in light and comfort, but oftener in darkness and gloom. This alternation of feeling is dignified moreover with the name of Christian experience, and regarded as an evidence of a work of grace within. It ought to be called the working of the evil heart of unbelief, for such it truly is. It arises from men looking to their frames and feelings instead of the sacrifice of Christ; and this is the very essence of unbelief. Our frames and feelings vary, but that sacrifice remains. If that sacrifice therefore is indeed our hope, our peace will remain. Regarding the question, whether God has forgiven us, as one settled and disposed of in the death and resurrection of Christ, we shall have no anxiety left save to glorify our Father in heaven. And as we go on to do so, under the guidance of his blessed Spirit, we shall meet with daily increasing evidence of his love and mercy, of his long-suffering, of the abundance of his goodness and truth. This ever-enlarging acquaintance with God, filling our hearts with his love, and drawing our affections after him, is the essence of true Christian experience, the true indication of the work of his grace within us.

The text teaches us in the second place, another truth of equal importance, viz. that the sacrifice of Christ, because it has taken away sin, admits not of repetition. The apostle reasons on this as a truth acknowledged by all. Sacrifices which are repeated, he says, bring sin to remembrance; a sacrifice which has put it away requires no repetition. What shall we say then to the Romish mass? We are told that it is the sacrifice of the body and blood of Christ, and yet those who say so, repeat it continually. Only one thing can be said, viz. that it is an open testimony to the inefficacy of Christ's sacrifice. If there be any truth in this apostolic argument, that Apostacy in her Masses has been for ages proclaiming openly that the blood of Christ is as valueless

as the blood of a bull, and that the body which was prepared by the Holy Ghost is as worthless as the body of a goat. From the inspired words before us I bring in the name of God this charge against her, and DEFY HER WHOLE PRIESTHOOD TO REPEL IT.

We should think of the sins of others however only as a subject of holy mourning, and that we may avoid them in our own persons. Let us carefully avoid all approaches to that apostacy. In this dangerous day such a caution is more than ever needful, for the approaches to it are gradual; we slide into her errors before we are aware. Let us take heed of calling the Lord's table an altar, and the bread and wine which are placed on it a sacrifice, and God's ministers priests. If that table be indeed an altar, if that bread and wine be indeed a sacrifice, and if the officiating minister be indeed a priest, there is no escaping, let us remember, from the dreadful consequence, sin is not taken away. To say that a sacrifice which admits of repetition, has taken it away, is to deny the inspired reasoning before us. Moreover, if these things be true, it never can be taken away. There is no other sacrifice for sin than that which is thus repeated; and a sacrifice which can be repeated, according to the reasoning of the text, possesses neither efficacy nor value. The priest of the Church of England is a presbyter, and has no affinity whatsoever with the sacrificing priest of the house of Aaron. The bread and wine in the holy sacrament are the consecrated memorials of the sacrifice which was once offered on earth and is now presented in heaven; they are the spiritual food by which the life of the soul is nourished; but they are not a sacrifice in themselves. The table on which they are placed is like that on which Christ and his apostles leant when they ate the last supper; it has no affinity whatsoever with an altar. Such comparisons in truth are most unworthy. The ministers of the new covenant belong to a far higher order than the sons of Aaron; they are the servants of Melchizedec. Their ministry also is after the same pattern. Melchizedec brought forth bread and wine to refresh the fainting household of the patriarch,

and it is their privilege to bring forth continually the memorials of him who loved us and gave himself for us, that refreshed now with heavenly consolation and strengthened to walk in the ways of God, we may attain at length to his eternal joy. May God therefore teach us our infinite obligations to that one Priest who by the sacrifice of himself offered once on the bitter cross, has made our peace with God! And may he grant to us, that delivered from all conscience of sin by faith in his precious blood, we may be found now and to the end, his true and faithful servants! We need nothing else for present peace, nothing else for everlasting salvation.

See Appendix, Note K.

LECTURE XVIII.

Hebrews x. 10—18.

"By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins; but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified. Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us: for after that he had said before, This is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin."

IN the words now read, St. Paul brings to a conclusion the triumphant argument of the third division of his subject. He has proved to the Hebrews out of their own Scriptures, as we saw in the last lecture, that the obedience and sacrifice of Christ were designed from the beginning to supersede the legal sacrifices, and that they have prevailed to do what these sacrifices could never do, viz. to expiate transgression. He now goes on to prove to them that because of the perfection of the sacrifice of Christ, it never can be superseded either by the repetition of itself or any other offering. Nothing now is to be expected, he declares, but the coming forth of Christ from his secret place to crush his enemies; He has accomplished by His one offering, all that is necessary for the salvation of his people. To confirm this

declaration, St. Paul refers again to the same Hebrew prophet whose words he had quoted before. The Holy Ghost, he says, in the mouth of Jeremiah, declares the tenor of the new covenant to be sin no more remembered, and the law of God, in consequence, written on the heart. And where remission of sin is procured, you know, my brethren, he concludes, that the object of sacrifice is attained, and that sacrifice therefore ceases.

It is not necessary to dwell more fully on the peculiar application of these verses to those to whom St. Paul was writing. He wrote for the Catholic Church: let us seek therefore to find in his words instruction and consolation for ourselves.

By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Four things are brought under our notice in this most important verse. We are told that Christ's people are sanctified; that the cause of this sanctification is God's will; that the means of it is the offering of the body of Jesus Christ; that this offering has been made "once for all." To sanctify is a word with which we are already familiar. It signifies to separate from a common to a holy use, to devote, to consecrate. And since all men are by nature devoted to the service of sin, it includes the purification and cleansing which is needful before we can be thus devoted to God. St. Paul declares God's will to be the cause of this sanctification. For the cleansing of the sinful and the consecration of their souls and bodies to his service, is a work too mighty to be accomplished by any save the Omnipotent alone. But to him nothing is impossible. It was his will from eternity that the Son of his love should be "sanctified, and sent into the world"¹ to obey and to die for the salvation of men; and that will accomplished its object. It is his will that in this path of holy obedience there shall be a people to follow Christ's steps; and the object is again accom-

¹ John x. 36.

plished, there is such a people. The one of these things is moreover the cause of the other; "for their sakes I sanctify myself," said the Saviour speaking of his people, "that they also might be sanctified."¹ The offering of his precious body is further declared to be the means of this sanctification. This was brought under our notice in the last chapter; the statements made there concerning the cleansing of the heavenly things themselves by the blood of the better sacrifice, are in all respects parallel with the statement now before us. The blood of this precious offering has taken away sin, and has obtained eternal mercy for as many as put their trust in it. And when this blood is sprinkled on the heart and conscience by faith, it ministers peace to that conscience and turns that heart to God. It also separates us from the service of sin, and consecrates us for ever to the service of truth and righteousness. The blessed purpose of the Saviour's death is thus accomplished by the application of his blood; he "gave himself for us," it is written, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people."² We are told finally that the sacrifice which thus sanctifies God's people, has been offered "once for all." The reason of this is found in its perfection; it can never be repeated, because it has accomplished its object. In the verses which follow we shall find this argument followed out.

And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: but this ONE, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool. For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.

The Hebrews are here reminded that their high-priest stood ministering daily, "and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices." The reason of the repetition is also stated;

¹ John xvii. 19.

² Titus ii. 14.

they "can never," says the Apostle, "take away sins." Christ, in the dignity of his person and power of his sacrifice, is next contrasted with these legal high-priests. This Priest, we read, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins of everlasting efficacy, "sat down on the right hand of God." The day is indeed at hand, as the Apostle's language intimates, when he shall come forth from that secret place; but it shall not be to offer sacrifice. By one offering he has perfectly accomplished all that is needful for the salvation of his people; and when therefore he comes forth again, it shall be to gather them to himself, and for ever to destroy his enemies.

There is another punctuation of the twelfth verse, now happily amended in the best editions of the Scriptures. It makes the Apostle affirm that Christ having offered one sacrifice for sins, has sat down for ever on the right hand of God. But he could not mean to affirm this, for it is not true. There is a termination to Christ's session at the right hand of God; he sits there, as the Psalmist,¹ and St. Paul in the words before us, both declare, only till his enemies be made his footstool. The Father's throne, which is his present seat, shall then be resigned for his own throne; he shall come to take his kingdom.² Instead therefore of reading *sat down for ever*, we must read in conformity with the whole strain of the context, *offered one sacrifice for sins for ever*, i.e. one sacrifice of everlasting efficacy. This will be made further evident if we compare together the twelfth and fourteenth verses. The one offering which has perfected for ever, spoken of in the latter, is manifestly the same with the one sacrifice for sins for ever, spoken of in the former of these verses.

St. Paul would impress both on the Hebrews and on us that there shall be no more sacrifice for sin; that there is one class for whose benefit it shall not be repeated, and that there is another class who do not stand in need of it. The former class are Christ's enemies; the latter are the sanctified. Both these classes are brought before us in one of

¹ Psalm cx. 1.

² Revelation iii. 21.

Matthew xxv. 31.

our Lord's parables, which also sheds light of the most important kind on the subject which we are now considering. "A certain nobleman went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom, and to return." Before he went away he delivered his money to his servants, desiring them to use it for his interest until he should come back. And while he was away "his citizens hated him, and sent a message after him, saying, We will not have this man to reign over us." In due time, as the parable proceeds to tell us, the nobleman did come back. He sent for his faithful servants and rewarded them according to their zeal and diligence; he sent for his enemies and slew them in his presence.¹ Now in all this, I need not say, we have a parabolic illustration of the text. In the nobleman who went into the far country, we at once recognize him who is gone to the right hand of God to receive his investiture as King. In the nobleman's faithful servants we recognize "them that are sanctified;" in his citizens who hated him we recognize the enemies of the Saviour. And finally, in the rewards conferred on the servants while the citizens were destroyed, we recognize the great truth of the text,—we learn that when Christ shall come again, he shall receive his people to himself and take vengeance on his foes.

These things however are deserving of more attentive consideration. Let us inquire who Christ's enemies are; what is implied in their being made his footstool, and why it shall be so? In the close of the first chapter of this epistle the two classes mentioned in the text are brought before us under almost the same names, being called in contrast, Christ's enemies and the heirs of salvation. And in the commencement of the second chapter St. Paul goes on to tell us that men fail to inherit salvation because they neglect it. Christ's enemies therefore are the neglecters of his gospel. We learn the same thing from the parable which we have just been considering. The enemies of the Saviour are set forth in it as those who hate him, and will neither receive him for their Lord nor yield themselves

¹ Luke xix. 12—27.

to be his people. Besides, it was immediately after having spoken this parable, that our Lord, as if he would shew both the meaning and the truth of it, wept over Jerusalem and foretold her coming doom. The inhabitants of that city had been privileged with his ministry of mercy and had beheld his wonders of love, but notwithstanding these claims on their affection, they would not receive him for their Lord. They were clearly pointed at therefore, in the enemies of whom he spake. Whilst the heavy woes which were denounced and afterwards executed on them, were a fore-shewing even in this world of the dreadful sentence of the parable "Bring hither and slay them before me." This is the meaning of Christ's enemies being made his footstool; they are made so, when they are crushed by his wrath. In that part of the epistle to which reference has just been made, St. Paul declares it to be impossible that they should escape this fearful doom. And it is so, because the sacrifice already offered having been rejected, "there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins."¹ God is not mocked: he has revealed his love and his forgiving mercy in the precious gift of his dear Son; and if this exhibition of his character fail to win us to be his servants, there shall be no further revelation of tenderness; wrath only is behind. This awful truth is distinctly stated in the text: the Priest who has gone in to God shall abide with him, till the time appointed for vengeance, when he will come forth to destroy his foes. But surely, it may be said, merciful intercession is the only thing which is in keeping with the priestly character; vengeance becomes it not. It is a great mistake to think so. There is, as I once before had occasion to point out, a priestly intercession against as well as for the world. "Ask of me," says Jehovah to him who sits at His right hand, "and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel."² Under the Mosaic economy it was part of the duty of the priests to attend the people when

¹ Hebrews x. 26.

² Psalm ii. 7—9.

they went to war with the enemies of the Lord, and by blowing the holy trumpets, to incite them to the conflict. It was so when the Midianites were smitten. Phinehas the son of Eleazar the son of Aaron the priest, was with the Lord's host on that occasion, "with the holy instruments and the trumpets to blow in his hand." And incited by the sacred sound, Israel did the Lord's work of vengeance; they burnt all the cities of the Midianites and all their goodly castles, they slew the five kings of Midian and all the males among their people, they slew also Balaam the son of Beor, who sought to curse the Lord's heritage, because he "loved the wages of unrighteousness."¹ Let us compare these things with what we read in New Testament-Scripture. One of the visions of the Apocalypse reveals the Saviour accepting the Father's invitation and making priestly intercession for the destruction of his enemies; it reveals also the seven ministers of his wrath with the awful priestly trumpets in their hands. He comes near to the golden altar and stands there, he offers the incense of his intercession with the prayers of all saints; and that intercession is accepted. Its nature soon appears; his next act is to fill his censer with fire of the altar and to cast it to the earth, and there are voices and thunderings and lightnings and an earthquake. His seven ministers of vengeance then "prepare themselves to sound;" and before they have done sounding, his enemies are made his footstool.² These things yet await their fulfilment; and when the sin of a wicked world shall exceed the limit of Christ's patience, they shall assuredly be fulfilled. He shall leave his seat on the right hand of God to come and stand at the golden altar: and then shall the end be.³

And as on the one hand, "there remaineth no more sacrifice" for Christ's enemies, so on the other, his people have no need of it; his one offering has perfected the sanctified for ever. We have already seen that the sanctified are those who having come to God by Jesus Christ, have received remission of their sins and have found peace

¹ Numbers x. 8, 9, xxxi. 6—10.

² Revelation viii. ix, x, xi.

³ Psalm lxxviii. 1.

of conscience in his blood. What then should they want with further sacrifice? In that one offering they have found everything which constitutes everlasting salvation. St. Paul puts this beyond all question, for he goes on to say,—

Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us, for after that he had said before (or, after having first declared) this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days; (then, or in the second place) saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts and in their minds will I write them; and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.

The meaning of this somewhat involved sentence is that the Holy Ghost has declared by the mouth of Jeremiah, first, God's purpose to make a covenant essentially different from the Jewish, and second, the tenor and provisions of that covenant. The Jewish covenant required the continual repetition of sacrifices, and provided no grace in which God might be served; but the Christian covenant, as we are here reminded, declares the everlasting remission of sin through the one great sacrifice of Christ, and has secured to those who trust in it, the grace of the Holy Ghost. It is moreover in these things that everlasting salvation consists; St. Paul refers to this testimony of the blessed Spirit as "a witness to us" that by his one offering Christ has perfected the sanctified for ever.

This deeply-important subject was brought under our notice before, and from the very same words of Old Testament-Scripture;¹ but it will bear consideration again, for it occurs now in connection with another and a distinct train of reasoning. A sinful creature in order to salvation, stands in need in the first place, of the remission of sin, and requires in the second place, to be cleansed in heart from its defilement. Both these blessings are secured by the sacrifice of Christ our Saviour. "To him give all the prophets witness" says St. Peter, "that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins."²

¹ Part III.—Lecture XII.

² Acts x. 43.

And this remission is irrevocable and everlasting ; Jehovah declares in the words before us, "their sins and iniquities will I remember no more." We have had repeated testimony already, in St. Paul's expositions of Christ's priesthood and sacrifice, to this most blessed and consoling truth. He has testified to it in the concluding verses of the eighth chapter, by a reference to this very scripture. He has declared in the ninth, that Christ has "entered once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption ;" he has reasoned in the commencement of the tenth, as we saw in the last lecture, that those who are cleansed by Christ's sacrifice, are cleansed once for all, and have no more conscience of sins. He has also stated most distinctly and fully that the forgiveness of God is thus secured to his people for ever because Christ is their Advocate, and can never cease to present his blood for them on high. This alone proves to us that there must be a provision for the moral cleansing of the forgiven. Without such provision, they might relapse into sin and apostatize from God ; and it is utterly impossible, consistently with the righteousness of the Divine character, that the creature should do so and yet continue to possess his favour. Besides, were there no such provision, Christ could not be said to have perfected his people for ever ; deliverance from the power and dominion of sin is a part of the perfect salvation. The words before us distinctly point to this provision, telling us that the Lord has made a covenant with his people, to put his laws into their hearts and to write them in their minds. God, in other words, has absolutely promised to sanctify those whom he has forgiven : and while his forgiveness is thus irrevocable, without fear of dishonour to his holy name, his salvation is perfect and complete. The promises of forgiving mercy and of sanctifying grace are indeed so blended and mingled together, that when the heart is opened to receive the one blessing, it receives the other also. "Repent, and be baptized every one of you" said St. Peter, "in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." And "they" it is added, "that

gladly received his word," i.e. that desired and welcomed this twofold blessing, "were baptized."¹ And as both blessings are thus poured at once into the hearts which Christ has opened, so the continuance of both is secured by his intercession on high. The same Advocate who pleads for his people's pardon, pleads also "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me," "sanctify them through thy truth."² His pleading has this twofold character, because the holiness of his people is as dear to his heart as their peace. And his intercession makes it equally sure; as it cannot be that they should come into condemnation, so it cannot be that they should cease to glorify God. It is thus that the sanctified are perfected for ever; and it is because they are so, that when Jesus shall come the second time, he shall come "without a sin-offering." Every purpose which sacrifice can possibly accomplish is accomplished with regard to them; and nothing therefore remains but that their Redeemer should receive them to himself.

Even in this brief sketch, we may discern something of the glory of the gospel and of the great salvation which that gospel reveals. The noble character of the motives which it suggests for Christian obedience, is not the least part of this glory. He who trusts in Christ, knows assuredly that he is possessed, through him, of God's eternal favour; and this faith engraves it on his very heart as "meet, right and his bounden duty" that Christ should be magnified in his body, whether by life or by death.³ How different is this from the obedience of the man who strives to keep commandments in which he has no delight, because he looks for mercy as his reward, or fears wrath as the penalty of refusal! This is not Christian obedience, and he who can conceive no higher motives of action has not the mind of Christ. But if these motives are taken away, it may be said, the Christian may forget his duty. No; God in dealing with his children is altogether independent of the servile principles of barter and of fear. Let man make conditions for the favour of

¹ Acts ii. 38, 41.² John xvii. 11, 17.³ Philippians i. 20.

his fellow; the spirit of barter is the spirit of the world. But "we have have received," says St. Paul, "not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God."¹ And again he testifies "ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father."² Those who are led by that Spirit are recognized by God as his children, and he to whose guidance they have surrendered themselves will not suffer them either to forget their Father or to wander from his ways.³ But is it possible for human nature to act on such high principles? It is not possible for human nature to do so; but in laying hold of the "exceeding great and precious promises" of the gospel, those very promises of which we have now been speaking, we are made "partakers of a Divine nature."⁴

We have a further testimony to these glorious truths in the last verse of the text,—

Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

Under the dispensation to which the Hebrews had been accustomed there were offerings for sin, there was also an altar and a priesthood; the Holy Ghost signified by these ordinances "that the way into the holiest of all was not made manifest," i.e. that sin was not taken away.⁵ But under the dispensation which is now introduced, says St. Paul, there are no offerings for sin, and by consequence, neither altars nor priests; the Holy Ghost would signify by this change of ordinance, that sin is taken away, and shall never be remembered against us if we have made Christ our hope. This argument well deserves our attention. If we had gone into the Jewish tabernacle to worship God, we should have found a priest standing at his altar of sacrifice; these accompaniments of legal worship were *the sign of the*

¹ I Corinthians ii. 12.

² Romans viii. 15.

³ Romans viii. 14.

⁴ II Peter i. 4. original.

⁵ Hebrews ix. 8.

dispensation. When we come into the Christian Church to worship God, we find neither priest, sacrifice, nor altar ; the lack of these accompaniments in Christian worship, is again *the sign of the better covenant.* The son of Aaron pointing to his sacrifice, said, behold the awful token that sin is not taken away. The Christian minister in the midst of the Christian congregation, says, sacrifice has ceased, sin is therefore made an end of, and we may rejoice in God our Saviour. It was not without an important reason then that I spoke so strongly in the last lecture, about the evil of calling the Lord's table an altar, and the holy communion a sacrifice, and God's ministers priests. Many use this language, because it does honour, as they conceive, to the Christian dispensation. But the effect of it is in truth the very opposite, it dishonours instead of honouring. It obscures the peculiar glory of that dispensation, the taking away of sin. And by concealing behind Jewish names the grace of him who has taken it away, it ministers the spirit of bondage and quenches the spirit of adoption.

I cannot leave this precious scripture without remarking that every truth of God which it contains, is either denied or perverted by the apostate Church of Rome. I referred briefly in the last lecture to her practice of continued sacrifice. It is argued on behalf of this practice, that as there were sacrifices under the law to prefigure Christ to come, so it is only reasonable that there should be sacrifices under the gospel, to testify that he has come. This is mere sophistry, to deceive the ignorant and unwary. The Holy Ghost enjoined sacrifices under the law, not merely to prefigure Christ to come, but to testify that until he should come, sin was not taken away. And the same Holy Ghost enjoins by the mouth of St. Paul in the text, that sacrifices be now discontinued, in testimony to those who trust in the Saviour, that since he has come and died, their sin and iniquity is remembered no more for ever. In the face of this prohibition the Church of Rome declares them to be still necessary for salvation, and directs their continuance. And in so doing she contradicts the Holy Ghost. We have here ordinance

against ordinance and testimony against testimony, the injunctions and declarations of the Vatican against the injunctions and declarations of God. Nor is this all. Christ has died to take sin away. And in declaring that notwithstanding his death it still remains, and that the repetition of his sacrifice is necessary to remove it, that apostate Church testifies openly to the utter inefficacy of that sacrifice. I pointed this out in the last lecture, but the scripture before us is much more explicit. St. Paul here says of the Jewish hierarchy, "every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices;" and it is impossible, themselves being judges, to describe the Romish hierarchy and their ministry in truer language. But if we do so, we are shut up to the apostle's conclusion; we are constrained to say of both orders of priesthood and of the sacrifices offered by both, "WHICH CAN NEVER TAKE AWAY SINS." And when we consider that the sacrifices offered by the one were bulls and goats, while that which is said to be offered by the other is the body and blood of Christ our Saviour, the conclusion is indeed a fearful one. And this is only a part of the dishonour which that apostacy does to Christ. St. Paul declares expressly in the text, that he who was counted worthy to offer the propitiatory sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, hath "SAT DOWN on the right hand of God" in openly-manifested Divinity. And in presuming therefore to offer that sacrifice, the Romish Hierarch and every priest under him declare themselves worthy of that seat. Let it not be supposed that in saying this, I am straining the words before us. The inspired writer of them, foreseeing by the spirit of prophecy that apostacy of which I am speaking, describes the head of it in the very terms which have been used now. He tells us that "as God, HE SITTETH in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God." And besides thus making void the work and stepping into the seat of the Son, that Hierarch is guilty of the yet further impiety of usurping the prerogatives of the eternal Father. The everlasting remission of sin which is declared by God in

¹ II Thessalonians ii. 4.

the text to those who trust in Christ's sacrifice, is one of the most sacred of these prerogatives. GOD ONLY can exercise it; as none but he can sanctify the forgiven, so none but he can provide that the mercy which is shewn to the creature shall conduce to the glory of his name. But did not Christ, it is often asked, give to his apostles the power of remitting sin? He gave to them, I answer, the power of removing the temporal chastisements which were its due; and St. Paul exercised this power in restoring the penitent Corinthian to the communion of the Church.¹ But God never gave to mortal creature, nor even to an angel in the realms of light, the power of remitting sin in relation to its eternal consequences. The absolution of the Church of England is merely declaratory: we tell you in his name, that HE pardons and absolves the penitent. But what God never gave, the Hierarch of Rome has stolen; presuming to shew mercy, as he presumes also to thunder in God's name. Why does not that apostate steal the other prerogative of the text,—why does he not write the law upon the heart and put it into the mind? The answer to this question unveils the mystery of iniquity. It is for a very different purpose that his pardons are dispensed; he sells them for money, to make sin an easier thing. It is not possible to conceive how impiety can go beyond this. The fathers of the reformation taught the faithful to pray in our first English litany, “from the Bishop of Rome and from all his detestable enormities, good Lord, deliver us.” The present generation see little need of this prayer; they resolve these “enormities” into slight differences of opinion, and call it liberality to do so. But if we fear the great and dreadful God, we shall esteem it no liberality to call evil by soft names. Were the people of England to speak of adultery and murder as trifling and venial offences, it would be a sign, not of growing liberality but of alarming moral deterioration. Now we ought to be more jealous for the glory of God, than we are for the peace and welfare of society. And when an apostacy therefore which denies and tramples on the Father, the Son, and the

¹ II Corinthians ii. 4—10.

Holy Ghost, is regarded as it is now coming to be regarded, as a light and venial thing, it is a sign, and a fearful sign, of spiritual deterioration in the midst of us. But it is even so; the sickly charity of this day is offended by the very name of Protestant. To be a Protestant is to protest against evil; and surely this is an honourable work. Let us not be ashamed then of PROTESTING against this apostacy; it is the most hideous form of evil which has ever appeared on the earth.

But it is not good that the sins of others should be the last topic suggested by this precious scripture. It is, as I have already remarked, the conclusion of the third part of this epistle, of St. Paul's exposition of the priesthood of the Lord Jesus. This exposition has taught us many things. It has taught us that Christ has been made Priest by the oath of the Everlasting, and that the priesthood thus committed to him, besides being far more honourable than that of Aaron, is perfect and eternal. It has taught us his qualifications for this sacred office; his perfect holiness enabling him to appear before God, his human feeling fitting him to sympathize with man. Finally, it has revealed to us the functions of this priestly ministry now exercised above the heavens. Christ presents there, as we have been told, the blood of his sacrifice for the continual pardon of his people's offences and for their continual acceptance with God; he also makes intercession for them on the ground of that sacrifice, according to their need. The peace and holiness of his people is the fruit of this priestly ministry. They abide in God's favour because he intercedes for them; they also serve God because grace is ministered through him. And being thus consecrated to God's service and prepared for his eternal kingdom, they wait for the coming of their Saviour to receive them to himself for ever. This high and holy standing of Christ's believing people has been brought before us especially by the subject of the present lecture. It has told us of the perfection of the sacrifice and priestly ministry of the Son; it has told us of the eternal forgiveness of the Father; it has told us that those who are

sanctified by the blood of that sacrifice, are perfected for ever. And to awaken our attention and command our faith, it has told us these things on the authority of the Holy Ghost. Father, Son, and Spirit are thus brought before us; and the Divine persons in whose name we were baptized, will not prove false to their holy covenant. Let us then believe the Spirit's testimony, put our trust in the sacrifice and prevalent intercession of Christ, and draw nigh to the Father through him. So shall we find now, but much more hereafter, what is the purpose and end of Christ's priestly office, that it is God's eternal glory and our eternal life. Which may he grant to us of his infinite mercy!

See Appendix, Note L.

PART IV.

 ADMONITION, ENCOURAGEMENT, AND WARNING.

LECTURE I.

Hebrews x. 19—22.

"Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God; let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water."

BEFORE we enter on the consideration of this glorious Scripture, we must look back for a moment to the preceding parts of the epistle, that we may understand the point at which we have now arrived. Those to whom St. Paul addressed it, had been accustomed to a dispensation which had been ordained by angels, of which Moses was the Mediator, under which a regular succession of priests were the appointed channels of intercourse between heaven and earth. The Apostle's object in addressing them was to commend the Christian dispensation to their regard, as one infinitely superior. He has therefore proved to them in the first and second parts of it, as we have seen, that Christ the

Minister and Mediator of the Gospel, is the Lord of angels, and the Divine Master whom their illustrious Moses served. He has also proved to them in the third part which we have just been considering, that Christ is the eternal High-Priest, of whose efficacious sacrifice and prevalent intercession the sacrifices and incense of the sons of Aaron were only feeble types. And having proved these things, he now proceeds to admonish, to encourage, and to warn them. We have finished therefore, in our brief review, the special consideration of apostolic doctrine, and are now, I trust, prepared to receive apostolic exhortation.

The character of the verses which we have read now, is peculiarly admonition and encouragement; they contain not a word of terror. I need not remark that their language is almost wholly typical, and that it would necessarily convey a fulness of meaning to those to whom it was addressed, which it does not convey to us. Let us endeavour in the first place, to discover this; to ascertain the sense in which a Hebrew would understand the words before us. And let us, assisted by this discovery, consider them in the second place, for our own edification and comfort.

I. St. Paul has distinctly declared to the Hebrews in the preceding part of this epistle, that their legal sacrifices and the incense of their legal high-priests, were utterly without power to take away sin and to procure for the guilty access into God's presence. He has referred moreover in proof of this, to the acknowledged fact that during the fifteen hundred years of the continuance of the legal economy, the holiest had remained shut against the entrance of any save of the high-priest alone. He has declared with equal distinctness, that the sacrifice of Christ then recently offered had taken sin away, and that his intercession had procured mercy for the guilty. It followed undeniably from these premises that the holiest was now open, and that all were invited to draw nigh to him who dwelt between the cherubim. The Apostle accordingly acknowledges and glories in this consequence of his previous doctrine; "having therefore" he says, "boldness to enter into the holiest, let us draw near." But that sacred

presence-chamber was for priests alone; and if all who trusted in Christ were invited to enter into it, it followed that all such were priests of God. The Apostle acknowledges this consequence also; he invites the Hebrews to draw near with hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and bodies washed with pure water; the antitypes, I need not say, of Aaron's cleansing for the priestly office. The Hebrews knew full well that if a high-priest under the legal economy had invited any of the children of his people to accompany him into the holiest that he might behold its unseen glories, both priest and intruder would have been struck dead on the instant. But it is not so now, says St. Paul, we who are "the house of God" may follow in the train of that High-Priest who is set "over" us, into the awful presence of the Divine Majesty. The rending of his sacred flesh on the cross has opened a way for us which our fathers knew not; and we need not fear, as we tread that way, that any thunderbolt of wrath shall arrest our further progress. God asks from us only a heart disposed to seek him; let us draw near then with such a heart, fearing no obstruction in our path, but fully persuaded of the deep reality of his fatherly mercy and love.

We often express surprise at the slowness of the early Jewish believers to comprehend and enter into the glorious liberty of the gospel. But if we duly considered their circumstances and entered into their feelings, we should be surprised rather at their early emancipation from the mental bondage of their law. They had been accustomed from infancy, to regard the holiest of all as the inaccessible retreat of the Divine Majesty, opened only on stated, solemn occasions, to the privileged son of Aaron. Great as had been the national provocations of Israel, interference with the sacredness of this retreat had not been one of them; no Jew during the past ages of their history, had ever attempted to force his way within its awful precincts. They had also been accustomed from infancy, to regard the priesthood as the peculiar heritage of Aaron's family; and no Jew could forget that Korah and his

company who had disputed this, had gone down living into the grave. And with these feelings which were to them a second nature, they heard it proclaimed that the sanctuary above, the true holiest, was now thrown open for all; nay, they were told besides, that every one who trusted in Christ was a priest, and should be accepted in priestly worship. The words of the text could convey to them no other meaning; for they encouraged them to take advantage of these newly bestowed privileges. It is not possible for us Gentiles to conceive what a shock such teaching must have been to the most sacred feelings of a Hebrew; a shock nearly as great as it would be to us to be told of a new Saviour! Nothing then but the teaching of the Holy Ghost enabling them to discern the mind of God from the beginning, reconciled the believing Hebrews to the gospel, and taught them to rejoice in it. Whilst the unbelieving and unenlightened among them concluded, as St. Paul himself once did, that they "ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth," for they regarded his servants as men who spake "blasphemous words against Moses and against God."¹

II. Let us now in the light of these remarks inquire into the text for our own instruction.

Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest.

We are apt to suppose that to any but Hebrew readers this typical language is a disadvantage. If we are acquainted however as we ought to be, with the Mosaic law, we shall find that the very reverse is the truth. Typical language expresses the shades of meaning, in a way in which common language has not the power to do it. The words before us are a very striking proof of this. St. Paul evidently means to tell us that we have liberty of approach to God. But if he had expressed his meaning in these words, we should have been left in comparative ignorance of it. For there are very different degrees of nearness of approach to God,

¹ Acts xxvi. 9.

² Acts vi. 11.

and we should not have known what degree was permitted to us. But by using tabernacle-language he makes this abundantly plain. There were three compartments in the tabernacle of Moses, and three degrees of nearness of approach to him who dwelt therein. The man who stood within the outer court, approached the God of Israel; the priest who stood within the holy place, the ante-chamber of his presence, approached him a step nearer; whilst the high-priest who once in every year stood within the holiest, confronted the glory of Jehovah throned between the cherubim, and approached him so near that nearer was impossible. This at once explains to us the meaning of the text, and explains it in a manner equally beautiful and satisfactory. "Boldness to enter into the holiest" is not merely liberty to approach the Lord; it is liberty to approach so near, that to come nearer is impossible. And it is not difficult to ascertain what this nearness is; human things in this instance, explain and illustrate Divine. I may approach a man as his domestic servant, going in and out before him and listening to his commands that I may obey them. If however I know him as my friend, if I share with him in his joys, his sorrows, and his pleasures, our intercourse is necessarily of a much more endearing kind. And there is an intercourse between human beings, which is more intimate and endearing still. The friend is sitting at table with his friend; the servant is respectfully standing, waiting on his master and on his master's guest. The door is opened suddenly, the little child runs in, finds his way at once to the father's bosom and puts his arms about the father's neck. This, I need not say, is the nearest approach to a human being; to come nearer is impossible. And it is even so with the Divine Being. God might have permitted us to come to him as servants. Even this would have been kindness far beyond our deserts; the holy angels have no higher standing before him. He might have permitted us to come to him as friends. This would have been condescension unspeakable; the faithful Abraham had no higher standing, no more honoured name. But God's kindness to the angels

of light, and his condescension to the saints who lived under the former covenant, are both thrown quite into the shade by the riches of his grace to us. For he permits us to come to him as children. This is the liberty spoken of in the text; and it is indeed approaching so near to him that to come nearer is impossible. He who lay in his bosom from everlasting said no more, could say no more, than *Abba, Father.*

It is a most striking and beautiful confirmation of the view just given, that the radical meaning of the word which is translated "boldness," is liberty of speaking without restraint, the liberty of the child in the presence of the fond parent. We may take this liberty with the holy and pure Jehovah. He invites us to tell him our thoughts, feelings and desires, to make him the companion of our joys, to unbosom to him our griefs, to seek his counsel in our perplexities. For the name Father which he has taken to himself is not an unmeaning word, but the revelation of a character. And if the gracious character which that name reveals, has indeed gained our affections for him to whom it belongs, we shall hail this blessed liberty, and esteem it our privilege to lay bare before him every feeling of which the heart is conscious.

The text goes on to tell us that we have this boldness

By the blood of Jesus.

These words are connected with the word "therefore" in the former clause. The Apostle has been demonstrating in the preceding part of the epistle, that the blood of Jesus has taken away sin, and has obtained everlasting remission for as many as put their trust in it. And he now proceeds to apply these statements. The blood which has effected this blessed object, he says, is on account of its having done so, our boldness to approach God as children. But forgiveness is not adoption; the king's pardon granted to the felon does not constitute him the king's son. This is just an example of the defect of all earthly illustrations of the glorious truths

of God. We have heard many times of royal pardons being granted to condemned felons ; but we never heard of a felon being pardoned through the shedding of his prince's blood. Such a pardon, if it had ever been dispensed in the history of mankind, would have been acknowledged by all who heard of it, as the revelation of paternal love on the part of the monarch to the forgiven. But what was never heard of on earth has been heard of in heaven ; the price of our pardon is our prince's blood ; " God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son." The blood of Jesus testifies thus to something more than pardon ; let us look on the agonies of Gethsemane and listen to the groans of Calvary ; surely no love less than paternal could have appointed such a sacrifice. That sacrifice is thus our boldness to approach God as children. When its blood gives peace to the conscience, and when the love which appointed it, is shed abroad in the heart, our immediate irresistible response is "Abba, Father." Blessed is the man who knows this as experimental truth ! He needs no one to expound to him the meaning of the words before us.

St. Paul pursues his blessed theme,—

By a new and living way which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh.

These words teach us a threefold lesson concerning the way to God as a Father through Jesus Christ. It is "a new and living way." It has been "consecrated for us" by Christ himself. It lies "through the veil, that is to say, his flesh."

This way was in the time of St. Paul, a new or recent way. For it was not until Jesus had died and risen again, that men were privileged to approach so near to God. This is a very important truth and very little understood. It is not to be forgotten on the one hand, that the way to God from the beginning was through the Saviour ; but it must also be remembered on the other, that until that Saviour appeared and was glorified, the fulness of God's grace was

¹ John iii. 16.

not revealed. He made himself known to Abraham and to the saints of the former covenant, as a friend and a master; but he did not make himself known as a father, save to Israel collectively as the typical nation. We find accordingly that not one of the Old Testament-saints ever presumed to call him by that endearing name. Scripture has recorded for us the prayers of Abraham, of Jacob, of Moses, and of Joshua. It has recorded also the prayers of Samuel and of David, of Isaiah, of Jeremiah, of Ezekiel, and of Daniel. They addressed the object of their worship sometimes as the Almighty, sometimes as Jehovah, sometimes as the faithful One who kept covenant and mercy to them that loved him; but they NEVER approached nearer. In the expressive language of St. Paul, "the way into the holiest of all" was not then "made manifest;"¹ the adoption was not revealed. The language "Abba, Father," addressed to the Most High, was never heard from the lips of a son of Adam till Jesus of Nazareth bowed the knee on earth. And he who set us the example of so addressing him, has put his own blessed word into our mouths. This fully explains why the way of adoption is called in the text, a new way. And it is a new way still. For it was shut for four thousand years against the best and holiest of mankind, and has been opened only in this last age of the world. And, blessed be God, it is living as well as new, for it gives life to those who walk in it. It was remarked already that if we had attempted to force our way into the holiest under the law, we should have been struck dead for our temerity. But we may enter into God's fatherly presence which is the true holiest, not only without incurring the penalty of death but with the assurance of finding life. For his favour is life; and he says, "Come!—I will receive you, and will be a Father to you."²

This way to God has been consecrated or hallowed for us, as we have partly seen already, by having been trodden first by the sacred feet of the Saviour. We ought never to forget, when we approach God as a Father, that we are using language consecrated by the sacred lips of the Son. This

¹ Hebrews ix. 8.

² II Corinthians vi. 17, 18.

remark applies with especial truth and beauty to what we have called "the Lord's prayer." Jesus was praying himself; and we know from Gethsemane that "my Father" was the language of his devotion. His disciples said, "Lord, teach us to pray." And the Son of the Blessed, rising from his knees, put his own language into his people's mouths: "When ye pray," he said to them, "say, Our Father." He has also consecrated this way in another and a larger sense. If our sins had remained upon us, we never could have approached God with this filial boldness; though we had seen the Son doing so, we could not have followed his example. But he who bade us follow it, was charged with these sins, and put them away by the shedding of his own blood. And when having done this, he ascended to heaven, and through the ranks of Cherubim and Seraphim reverently making way for him, advanced to the right hand of the throne and took his seat as the Son of God, it was in right of his own blood that he thus advanced, and in right of his own blood that he thus sat down.* For he took that seat, not as an individual but as the head and representative of his saved people, to encourage them after him to draw near to God as sons. And when we draw near in the same spirit of adoption, placing our confidence in our Saviour's blood, we are treading the very path which he has trod before us. Yea it is because he trod it first, that it is open for us after him.

We learn from the words that follow, that it was not always open; it lies "through the vail, that is to say, his flesh." If we had passed through the outer court of the tabernacle of Moses into the holy place, intending to make our way into the holiest, we should have found our further progress stopped by a vail. That vail was the Divinely-appointed token that sinful flesh might not approach the Lord. St. Paul here likens it to the flesh of Christ, and there is a most remarkable correspondence between them. For as during the many ages of its suspension, the holiest continued shut, so until the flesh of Christ was rent, God

* Luke xi. 1. 2.

† Hebrews ix. 11, 12.

was not accessible as a Father. And when that sacred flesh was rent on the cross, opening the bosom of God to sinful man, "the vail of the temple was rent" by an invisible hand, destroying the peculiar privilege of the high-priest, and opening the holiest to all. The new, living, and consecrated way to God lies then through that of which this vail was a type, even the rent flesh of our Redeemer. It is a new way; this vail was not rent till he bowed his head in death. It is a living way; since that which declared God inaccessible has been rent by his own hand, there is no cause for fear in approaching him. And it is a consecrated way; when Jesus passed into the presence of the Father, as our Head and Representative, he passed to him through death, through the rending of his flesh on the cross as the atonement for our sins. And having thus passed in, he calls on us to follow him.

This leads us to consider what St. Paul further declares,—

And having an High-Priest over the house of God.

It has been already remarked many times, that under the legal economy the high-priest alone might enter into the holiest of all. The text presents us therefore with what under that economy would have been the strangest of all anomalies, viz. a company of worshippers within the holiest with a high-priest presiding over them. These worshippers are called "the house of God," for they have believed on the name of his Son,¹ and abide in his presence as his accepted children. And Jesus is in the midst of them, writing God's law on their hearts and putting it in their minds, teaching them also how to worship their Father and how to behave themselves before him. Moreover, since the holiest is now open, this worshipping company admits of continual increase. And the gospel-invitation is the voice of Jesus from within that sanctuary, calling on men to come to him, and promising that he will be the friend and advocate of as many as accept his grace. This is a blessed, additional encourage-

¹ Hebrews ii. 6.

ment to what that gospel has declared of his death : without such addition indeed the salvation proclaimed in it would be essentially defective and imperfect. There is some cause depending which affects our property or perhaps our lives ; and we are desirous to find our way to the court of the Sovereign, that we may ask for justice. Our first difficulty is to obtain permission to go. It however is at last surmounted, and we are told that we may come. But though that permission has removed the obstacles in our way, we still hang back. We are unaccustomed to the glare and pomp of courts, and have no courage to appear in the presence of anointed majesty. We shall find no words, we say, in which to state our cause, and the poverty of our pleading shall only injure it ; we therefore refuse to go. We are absorbed in these desponding thoughts, when one whom we have long known as our best and truest, our most tried and trusted friend on earth, sends to tell us that he has been appointed prime minister and bosom-counsellor to the Sovereign of whom we are afraid. Be not afraid, he says ; let your eye seek out me when you are introduced to the brilliant circle which surrounds the Sovereign ; I will advance to meet you, and make known your cause. If you know not what to say, I will tell you ; if you have not courage to utter it, I will be your advocate ; come, and you shall not be put to shame. This message brings with it the very encouragement which we need, and we proceed to court with cheerfulness and comfort ; our fear is gone, because our friend is there before us. This illustration shadows forth, though feebly and unworthily, the blessed truth which we are now considering. The gospel invites us into the holiest. We are reminded in the first two verses of the text, as our encouragement to accept this invitation, that the blood of Jesus has taken away sin and revealed the love of God ; that love has assured us moreover of his gracious welcome. But we shrink from approaching the Majesty of Heaven ; his terror makes us afraid. We are therefore reminded in the words which we are now considering, that the friend who sticketh closer than a brother,

the Son of Man,—who laid down his life to take away our sins, and gave his flesh to be rent on the bitter cross that we might find our way to God,—we are reminded, I say, that HE is within the holiest and waits to receive us there. If we know not how to approach God as we ought, He is there to teach us; if we know not how to pray, He is there to pray for us; if we feel unable to glorify God and serve him, He is there to write the law on the heart and to put it into the mind. What an unspeakable encouragement to draw near to God is here! But this is the encouragement which the blessed gospel affords. While it testifies to Christ's death in humiliation, it testifies also to his life in glory; while it testifies to his sacrifice, it testifies also to his Priesthood. The former of these gracious acts on our behalf, would, as I have already remarked, be imperfect without the latter. "It is Christ that died," says St. Paul, "yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."¹

I have said that the text reminds us of these glorious truths. For this is not the first time that they have been brought under our notice; the Apostle has demonstrated and explained them at large in the preceding part of the epistle. His present reference to them is merely in application. We shall find that application in the last verse of the text.

Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Every word which we have now read, is pregnant with instruction. We have been reminded in the immediate context, that God has not spared the Son of his bosom, and that having given him to die, he has put forth the exceeding greatness of his power in raising him from the dead and seating him at his own right hand.* The end and object of these mighty acts is now announced; these things were done that we might "draw near" to God. What a testimony

¹ Romans viii. 34.

* Ephesians i. 19, 20, 21.

is this to the love of God to man! What a testimony to the longing of that love that his banished ones may return to him again! Surely in drawing near to him in terms of this gracious invitation, and through this gracious provision, we ought to do so "with a true heart." His heart is true to us; it was no feigned love which gave his Son to die. The tender husband and affectionate father seek in return the heart of the wife and child; and they feel themselves aggrieved, if what they seek is denied. He then whose love to us has been so true, so deep and so lasting, may well ask us to love him again; may well ask that sincerity of affection which shall lead us to keep his commandments, and to do those things which are pleasing in his sight. It is the first thing which he asks, as we may read in the words before us; for it is more precious to him than the riches of a world. But how shall we yield it to him? how shall we attain to love God? Only by believing that he has first loved us. St. Paul therefore adds immediately, "in full assurance of faith." Faith is trust in God; and full assurance of faith is unhesitating and unwavering trust in him. The object of this faith and of this full assurance, is that blessed gospel of his love and fatherly mercy, which from the very commencement of this epistle, has been so largely set before us. And if we confide in it and draw near to him, we will do so with a true heart; for the love in which we believe will constrain us to love him again. The same assurance of faith will enable us to obtain the blessing of "hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience." This "evil conscience" is not the consciousness that we have offended; from that we can never be delivered. It is the fear which hath torment arising from the remembrance of our offences; the fear which made our first parents hide themselves "among the trees of the garden," and made St. Peter fall down at Jesus' knees, exclaiming, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"¹ This fear visits every one of us when we are first convinced of sin; but assured faith in God's mercy delivers from it, and gives us boldness to draw near to him.

¹ Luke v. 8.

The consciousness of sin remains ; but the evil conscience is gone. That Apostle who at first begged his master to depart from him, had not forgotten his sins when, as soon as he recognized him on the beach, he cast himself into the sea to swim to land and greet him.¹ Assurance that these sins were forgiven, inspired this impatience of love. And God would have all who draw near to him, to do so in the same spirit of faith and holy confidence. As he seeks a true heart from us, he would have us to be persuaded that his heart is true. He is not glorified by the trembling fear of slaves ; he would have us abide in his presence, in the peaceful confidence of children. But he would have us to be holy as well as peaceful : St. Paul therefore adds finally, "our bodies washed with pure water." It cannot indeed be otherwise ; if we would dwell in "the holiest," we must be holy. These words refer doubtless in the first place, to Christian baptism. But the reference is deeper than to the external rite ; for the true heart, assured faith, and peace of conscience, are all internal things. The baptismal rite however is the sign of internal cleansing, and the seal from God that we may expect that blessing at his hands. Our Lord therefore joins them together, telling us that we must be born again "of water and of the Spirit."² And St. Paul in another place speaks of "the washing (or laver) of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost."³ The same double reference may be discerned in the words before us. St. Paul would remind those to whom he was writing, that they had been "buried with Christ by baptism into death," and that as they rose from the cleansing waters they had vowed to God, "that like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so" they also would "walk in newness of life."⁴ Remember this vow, my brethren, he would say, and submit your hearts continually to the washing of the Spirit of Jesus, that you may be enabled to perform it. So shall you be found meet to dwell in the holiest ; meet to go in and out before your pure and holy Father as the accepted children of His love.

¹ John xxi. 7.² John iii. 5.³ Titus iii. 5.⁴ Romans vi. 4.

It was remarked already, that in the two last clauses of this verse there is an evident allusion to Aaron's priestly cleansing. Aaron, as we learnt before, was washed with water at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and sprinkled with blood; he was then permitted to enter the holiest, and to officiate there as a priest. Now we who believe on Jesus have the reality of all this. Our hearts are washed from wickedness by Christ's holy Spirit, and our consciences are pacified by his atoning blood. We have thus the high calling of priests of God, and offer within the holiest the sacrifices of prayer and thanksgiving. This furnishes us with additional reasons against calling God's ministers priests, and speaking of them as ordained to offer sacrifices. Such language makes in the first place, a distinction between them and the rest of God's people which is not warranted by holy Scripture; for all the faithful are priests, and consecrated to offer sacrifices. And it dishonours the Christian ministry in the second place, by comparing it with that which was immeasurably its inferior. If we had attempted to do honour to St. Paul by calling him a priest, or if we had proposed to him to do honour to himself by putting on the robes of Aaron, he would have told us that Aaron when clad in his pontifical vestments on the solemn day of atonement, was but a feeble shadow of the high standing and glorious dignity of the meanest believer in Jesus, "the least in the kingdom of heaven. Those who serve Christ in the holy gospel have indeed much honour put upon them; but it is not the honour of being priests; it is the much higher distinction of being allowed to minister to priests.

And whether we be ministers or those ministered unto, one thing is needful for our salvation, one thing is required of us. God calls on us to believe this blessed gospel with fully assured faith, and to yield to him those true and faithful hearts which his love revealed in it has so well deserved from its objects. May he of his infinite mercy effectually teach us so to do! For while the mere knowledge of these things profits nothing, to receive them thus is EVERLASTING LIFE.

LECTURE II.

Hebrews x. 23—27.

“Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised;) and let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.”

FOR our better understanding of the verses which we have just read, let us look back for a moment, to those which immediately precede them. They taught us that God was our Father in the blood of Jesus, and that we had boldness to draw near to him with the open-hearted and unsuspicious confidence of children. Having reminded us of these glorious gospel-privileges, St. Paul most naturally proceeds to stir us up to the exercise of faith and love, and to warn us also of the dreadful consequences of being found at last the enemies of the Saviour. His exhortation and warning have especial reference however to the circumstances of peculiar trial in which the Hebrews were then placed. We shall therefore consider the text in the first place, in its application to them, taking it part by part. And we shall examine

its statements in the second place, in their catholic application to the Church and people of God.

I. *Let us hold fast the* CONFESSIO*N OF THE HOPE* *without wavering; (for he is faithful that promised.)*

This exhortation implies that those to whom it was addressed, were in danger of letting slip their confession of Christ's name. This arose from the persecutions and tribulations which that confession entailed on them at the hands of their unbelieving countrymen. We have an account of these persecutions in the immediately-succeeding context. "Ye endured" says St. Paul, "a great fight of afflictions...ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions...ye took joyfully the spoiling of your goods."¹ And we may form some idea of the fierce and unrelenting character of their persecutors from what is recorded of the writer of this epistle when he was one of them. He breathed out "threatenings and slaughter" St. Luke tells us, "against the disciples of the Lord."² "Many of the saints" he says himself, "did I shut up in prison...and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blasphemy; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities."³ We may form some idea of it too from the exceeding madness of his countrymen against him, when in his turn he became Christ's servant. When he attempted to make his defence before them in Jerusalem, they cried "Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live."⁴ And when he afterwards lay in prison, protected by the Romans from their violence, "more than forty" of them "bound themselves under a curse, that they would neither eat nor drink, till they had killed him."⁵ It was to such furious violence as this that the Hebrew Churches were then exposed. But let none of these things move us, says the Apostle taking in

¹ Hebrews x. 32—34.

² Acts ix. 1.

³ Acts xxvi. 9—11.

⁴ Acts xxii. 22.

⁵ Acts xxiii. 12, 13.

himself along with them, I do not say to let slip our profession, but even to waver in our adherence to it. For God has promised both to sustain us in trouble now, and to reward us eternally hereafter. Wave may succeed wave, and billow after billow may break over our heads, but we shall not be overwhelmed; the furnace of tribulation may be heated seven times more than we have ever yet known it, but we shall not be consumed. "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee," is the promise of Abraham's God; "and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."¹ "Blessed are ye" says the Saviour, "when men shall hate you...and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold your reward is great in heaven."² Let us strengthen our hearts in these promises; we may rest assured that the Promiser "is faithful." If we ask for a guarantee of his faithfulness, it is enough to say that he is God. But we have a dearer guarantee: he is our Father who has given his beloved One to die for us, and has opened our way to his own paternal bosom through that Saviour's precious blood. He has done these things on our behalf, to encourage us to put our trust in him. Shall he then deceive us by leaving us alone in trouble? Has he assured us of his presence and help, only that we may trust in a lie? It is impossible! Can he see us parting with substance and reputation, yea laying down our lives for his name, and leave such generous devotion unrewarded hereafter? It is for ever impossible! If we being evil, deal truly and faithfully with our children, how much more shall our Father in heaven keep his gracious promises to those that trust in him! The experience of Him who taught us to call God our Father, is a most glorious testimony to this consoling truth. He sunk in deep mire where there was no standing; he came into deep waters, where the floods overflowed him; he mourned in his complaint, "All thy waves and thy billows are

¹ Isaiah xliii. 2.² Luke vi. 23, 23.

gone over me.”¹ But his stay was the promise, “I will be with him in trouble; I will deliver him, and honour him.”² And he was not made ashamed of having trusted in it. He himself declared in the hour of his sorest extremity, “I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”³ And we have only to look to his glorious resurrection, and to lift our eyes to that place of light inaccessible where he is seated above, to be convinced that he is not ashamed of this confidence now. For he who was with him in trouble, has delivered and has honoured him. Now God’s tempted people, as the Apostle would here remind the Hebrews, have the same Father still to confide in.⁴ Let us confide then; and when we are tempted to doubt his faithfulness, let us remember Jesus and dismiss the evil thought from our hearts.

Having thus exhorted the Hebrews to steadfast and unwavering hope, the Apostle stirs them up to the exercise of the kindred grace of love.

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another.

Nothing can surpass the beauty of this apostolic exhortation; it is so exquisitely applicable to persons circumstanced as the Hebrews then were. For when tribulation and sorrow are permitted to come upon us, our corrupt hearts are sadly prone to abate in the fervour of their love to God; and when man is the instrument of these vexations, we are naturally disposed to hate him in return. Remembering, my brethren, St. Paul would say, that this is our tendency in our present circumstances, “let us consider,” i. e. make due allowance for “one another.” But while we do so, let us at the same time strive to be mutually helpful, that this corrupt tendency may be subdued. Let us turn away each other’s attention from present suffering and sorrow to the gracious purpose which God has in sending them; let every one remind his brother of the riches of redeeming love, and of the exceeding

¹ Psalm lxxix. 2. xlii. 7. ² Psalm xci. 15. ³ John xvi. 32. ⁴ John xx. 17.

greatness and glory of God's everlasting promises. Let us by doing so, stir up each other's hearts to love him again, and to shew that love by all those works of righteousness which are to the praise and honour of his holy name. Let us moreover remind each other continually of God's long-suffering with our persecutors, of his patience toward them, yea of that love which not only bears their provocations but is even now returning to them good for evil. So shall we all be stirred up to the same spirit of love and to the same behaviour of kindness, "not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing; but contrariwise, blessing:"¹ not "overcome of evil," but overcoming "evil with good."²

He would also shew to them that this sacred principle of love should make them willing even to hazard their lives for God and for their brethren. For it was at the hazard of his life at that time, that any man appeared openly in the assemblies of the faithful; and some, as the text informs us, absented themselves through fear. Let not us be so fearful, says the Apostle; by meeting together in his name in the face of our enemies, let us testify openly, as righteous Daniel did in Babylon,³ our zeal for God and for his cause. Let us do it also for our own and for our brethren's sake; "exhorting one another." This mutual exhortation was the purpose for which the early Christians met; and the Church being at that time filled with the Holy Ghost, her private members were able to take part in the ministry. Now the present, St. Paul would say, is a season of peculiar danger and extremity; and we stand in peculiar need of the encouragement of each other's counsels and prayers. Whilst this therefore is the season chosen by the fearful for abiding at home, let the dangers with which it is fraught to ourselves and to our brethren constrain us to be always present at the assemblies of the saints. For we are called, at the peril of our lives, to strengthen each other's hearts and to hold up each other's hands in the Lord.

Some of those to whom these exhortations were addressed, might think that too much was expected from them. We

¹ 1 Peter iii. 9.

² Romans xii. 21.

³ Daniel vi. 10.

are not forgetful, they might say, of our duty to God, and are desirous of waiting on his holy worship; we also bear the love of brethren to his faithful disciples: but it is not reasonable to ask us to come openly forward in the face of bloody threatenings and murderous violence. It is also enough for us if in this evil and perilous day we take the burden of our own spiritual state; we have no thoughts to spare on our brethren. To these reflections and complaints so natural to fallen man, St. Paul's language in the immediately-preceding context had already furnished a complete and sufficient answer. It reminded them that the Son of God had exposed himself to murderous violence on their account, and that he had not only hazarded but had given his life for them. It reminded them of the Divine consideration, that God had interested himself about them in their low estate, when they were destitute of love, and knew not how to practise righteousness. It reminded them, that then taking on himself the burden of their misery, he had sent his Son from heaven to point out the way of life. And in reminding them of these things it bade them go and do likewise; loving him who had first loved them, and loving others after his example.

And lest this gracious motive should be insufficient, St. Paul here adds another,—

And so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

The primary reference of these words was, I have no doubt, to the destruction of the Jewish state and polity which was then impending, and which proved indeed to be devouring judgment and fiery indignation. Christ had prophesied that destruction, and the believing Hebrews could not be ignorant of his words. The token of their approaching fulfilment were moreover now every where to

be seen; the clouds were manifestly gathering which were to burst on that devoted people. It is a well known fact in history, that Christ preserved his faithful ones on that awful occasion; among the myriads of Jews who perished, there was not one who believed on his name. But immunity and preservation were promised to none else; that dreadful judgment was sent expressly to "devour the adversaries." This throws great light on the words now before us. I have reminded you, says St. Paul, of the love of God and of his gracious promises, to encourage you in your adherence to the Saviour; let me now remind you of the terrible weight of his wrath. That wrath is just about to descend on the heads of our unbelieving countrymen. And if we make this the time of wavering in our steadfastness, if we begin now to desert the assemblies of the faithful, and if after a while through the influence of fear, we forsake our profession and enlist ourselves afresh in the ranks of Christ's enemies, we shall have none to whom to flee for refuge when the day of vengeance comes. Jesus is the only refuge; and "if we sin" thus "wilfully" against him "after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice;" God's wrath shall overtake and shall devour us. If we are not careful for our brethren then, let us at least be careful for ourselves; the wrath of man may be terrible, but it is not to be compared with the wrath of God.

In thus reminding the Hebrews at once of the love and wrath of God, and bringing both considerations to bear at once upon their minds, St. Paul makes use of a mode of practical address, which is very common with him in all his epistles. It has been already explained that the apostles had no infallible assurance of the gracious state of those to whom they were writing. They used this mode of address therefore as a touchstone of sincerity or hypocrisy. Those who knew the grace of God in truth, felt the force of the holy motives which were presented to them, and responded from the heart to the calls of Christian duty. Whilst those on the other hand, who were insincere and hypocritical, might be persuaded by the terrors of the Lord, to seek the

grace of that Saviour in whom they only professed to believe; or if they were not so persuaded, were left without excuse. These remarks are especially applicable to the epistle which is now before us. Just before he poured out his wrath on the unbelieving Jewish nation, God seems to have permitted a tempest of persecution to arise against the Hebrew Churches in Palestine, to shake the insincere out of his house and separate the chaff from the wheat. For chaff and wheat were doubtless mingled among them, as in every Church of God. There were those who really knew and loved the Saviour; and these felt in this day "of rebuke and blasphemy," the temptation of the weak flesh to waver, and the temptation to selfishness which suffering always brings. And there were others who had long been convinced in their understandings that Jesus was the Christ, and were numbered among his professing people, though they had never truly known his grace. These were already wavering in their adherence to him; they were beginning to retire from the assemblies of the saints; they were watching their opportunity, if the storm should increase, to avoid its fury by separating themselves altogether from the faithful. The epistle seems to have been written expressly to meet this crisis. The text has especial reference to it. The Apostle in its commencement, brings to bear upon the Hebrews the whole power of that blessed love, the glorious riches of which have in the immediate context been set forth by him so largely. This could not fail to address itself to the true-hearted among them; it would minister strength to the weak, and encourage the timid; while the rising spirit of selfishness would be awed down and repressed in all such by the exhibition of the blessed Cross. But he follows it up, as we have seen, by reminding them of the coming vengeance, and by warning those who were beginning to retire from the Christian assemblies, that their partial defection would soon issue in open apostacy, and that in seeking to avoid the wrath of man they should be consumed by the wrath of God. Fear might reach those who could not be acted on by love; and faithful warning of the coming

destruction might lead them to the Saviour, to escape it. I have already observed that there is consummate wisdom in this mixed exhortation: it ought to be the model now for the ministers of Christ to follow. For we know not with certainty whom we are addressing, and it addresses every one. The word of love speaks to the true-hearted; the word of terror may by God's grace alarm the insincere, and lead them to flee to the Saviour.

II. Let us now consider the application to ourselves, of these counsels and solemn warnings.

We are exhorted to "hold fast the confession of the hope without wavering;" and are reminded, to encourage us to do so, of the promises of a faithful God. The hope here spoken of, is confidence in God's love, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, the spirit of adoption whereby we cry, Abba, Father. And we make confession of this hope when our life, behaviour, and conversation declares before all men that we are the children of the Highest. The Hebrews were exposed on account of this confession, to persecution, affliction, and death; and yet St. Paul bids them hold it fast, and beseeches them not to waver. We then may surely be addressed in the same manner. For we have escaped their troubles, "the burden and heat of the day;" there is none to harm or even to make us afraid in following that which is good. Our temptations come from another quarter; the cares of this world, or the deceitfulness of riches, or the lusts of other things, choke the word in our hearts. And our safety is what St. Paul here presses on the Hebrews, AN UNWAVERING HOPE; whether the world threatens or seeks to seduce, IT is all-powerful to overcome. Let us seek to realize the love of that heavenly Father who dwells between the Cherubim; let us enter into his presence and abide there; let us open our hearts to the Spirit of adoption, that we may prove its peace, its blessedness, its joy. Let us meditate continually on His everlasting promises, let us contemplate the Cross of the Saviour, the pledge that the Promiser is faithful. The heart filled with a better affection, will disentangle itself of earthly love, and ascend-

ing to God will leave the world behind it. Our light shall thus shine before men; they shall see our good works and glorify our Father; our holy lives shall be the confession of our christian hope.

The exhortation which follows, flows necessarily out of that which has preceded it. He who dwells between the cherubim is LOVE. And if we have entered into the holiest according to his invitation, and are there beholding his glory, it will change us into the same image, so that we shall love him supremely and love his children for his sake. Those who have entered into the holiest are his children; "as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."¹ The knowledge and the love of the same heavenly Father is the blessed bond which connects all such together; and we if led by the Spirit, shall be conscious to this bond. We shall seek out those who do God's will upon the earth, and stretching out our hands to them, will say with Jesus "whosoever shall do the will of my Father, the same is my brother and sister and mother."² And it will be no effort to us to comply with the exhortation of the text respecting them. Love to our common Father will lead us to desire his glory in his children; and love to them for his sake will make us seek their growth in the knowledge and establishment in the ways of God. We shall therefore esteem it our privilege, by our life, behaviour, and example, "to provoke to love and good works." And taking into account the peculiar circumstances, temptations, and hindrances of each, we shall be continually considering how we may be helpful to all. Very different from this is the spirit of the formal professor. Why should I take the burden of my brother's soul, he asks,—“Am I my brother's keeper?” This alas is mournful language, and he who makes use of it has not the mind of Christ. For this brotherly love of which I have now spoken, is the very life and soul of genuine Christianity; it is that bond of perfectness without which the Church of God could not exist in the world. True Christians are called in the immediate context, “the house” or family “of

¹ Romans viii. 14.

² Matthew xii. 49, 50.

God." We never heard of a family in which the members cared for themselves only, in which there was no common interest, no family-bond. And shall the children of him whose name is Love, be the only family of which this is the character? the only household in which selfishness reigns supreme? Nay, God forbid! Again, true Christians are called "the body of Christ" and "members one of another."¹ Now in the human body, which is the Divine illustration of this mystery, every member serves its fellow. The eye sees, the ear hears, the mouth tastes, the hands handle, and the feet walk, not for themselves, but for the body. Aim a blow at the eye, and the hand with instinctive courtesy, is lifted up in an instant to shield it! Were it otherwise, were these members to live and act for themselves only, the human body could not continue to exist, for dissolution would necessarily ensue. And it is the same with the body of Christ; its very existence depends on its being thus bound together. Let Christ's people think of themselves only, and Christ's Church must cease. If they desire its continuance to the glory of his great name, they must drink into the spirit of the exhortation of the text, they must consider one another.

But this exhortation has a larger meaning. There are many who have never entered into the holiest, and yet have upon them the calling of children of God. This is the case indeed with the great majority of baptized men; they are prodigal children, but still they are children of our Father. The exhortation of the text to consider one another, includes every one of them; and the same love of God in the heart which knits us in holy affection for his sake to those who do his will, will teach us to extend our regards to them all, because his sacred name is upon them. And though they cannot be provoked to love and to good works, because they are destitute, alas! of the principle of holy affection toward their much-injured Father, and have never yet begun to serve him, we will not refuse to consider their case, yea we will do so only with intenser compassion. No exhortation, no counsel, no affectionate entreaty on our part shall be

¹ I Corinthians xii. 27. Romans xii. 4, 5.

wanting; and if by these or any other means the repentant feet of one of them is turned to his Father's house, and we can truly say, this our brother "was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found,"¹ it will minister to us a joy which the world knows not, and which it cannot afford to its children when their corn and wine most abound. How very different is this, I am constrained again to remark, from the spirit of the formal professor! He looks with hard-hearted indifference on the sins of his baptized brethren; yea (I tremble to add) he too often makes a jest of them. Oh what a sign is this of the absence of the Spirit of Jesus! We read in holy Scripture, that "fools make a mock at sin."² And if we would understand the meaning of that word, let us repair to Calvary; sin killed him who died there. I have often been struck with the exquisite beauty of the following lines. They describe the angels hovering round the Cross:—

"Around the bloody tree they pressed with strong desire
That wondrous sight to see, the Lord of Life expire!
And could their eyes have known a tear,
In sad surprise had dropt it there."

Let us contemplate the Cross with the feelings here ascribed to the angels, and so far from making a jest of that accursed thing which caused its bitter sufferings, we shall never be able to look on it with dry eyes. And as we see every day in our baptized brethren, its pestilential plague-spot, the sign of that sickness which, if uncured, will issue in eternal death, the love which inspired the Cross, will constrain us to consider continually by what means the health of the daughter of our people may be recovered.

This hope and love led the Hebrews, as we have seen, not to forsake the assembling of themselves together; they met to exhort one another in the face of cruel threatenings and death; and St. Paul encourages them to persevere. We have no threatenings to deter us from the house of God, for in his holy providence none dares to make us afraid. And surely then the same hope and love which inspired the He-

¹ Luke xv. 22.

² Proverbs xiv. 9.

brews thus to meet together, will teach us not desert the stated assemblies of God's people. It is alas "the manner of some" to allow any frivolous hindrance to detain them; but this is because they esteem the services of God's house as a form: they come, but it is not to worship their Father, it is not to hear his word. If however we know God as our Father, and have experienced the word which is ministered in his house to be indeed the word of everlasting life, we shall need no other motive to bring us to the Christian assembly. It is not possible now indeed for all to take part in the ministry, for the condition of the Church is altered; but still the words before us have not lost their meaning. They bid the congregation repair to the house of God, seeking heavenly instruction from him in whom they believe; they bid the minister repair to it, inspired by the same faith and love, with earnest and longing desire to bestow that instruction. Oh that pastors and flocks would thus meet together in the name of their common Father!—they should be blessed continually and abundantly in doing so, by their common Saviour above. We are not straitened in Him, we are straitened in our own bowels.

But the concluding verses of the text present us, alas! with a very different object of contemplation, even the spiritual state and future doom of many, who yet have upon them, as has already been observed, the calling of sons of God. Though they have "received the knowledge of the truth," i.e. have heard of God's fatherly love, of the sacrifice of Christ, and of the gracious invitation which their baptism seals, to draw near to God as children, they abide away, "wilfully" disobedient and rebellious. No one can contemplate the state of the baptized world, can look upon the profanation among baptized men, of God's name, sabbaths, and ordinances, or upon the lies, thefts, murders, adulteries, and all manner of evil and unclean things, which are every day-manifestations of their moral and spiritual condition, and doubt for a moment that this statement is mournful truth. What then shall be the issue of this? Shall Christ's sacrifice prevail to save those who thus "sin wilfully?"

Nay, God forbid! The whole power of that sacrifice to save, lies in its having opened the holiest: if it could save us though abiding in rebellion, Christ would be the minister of sin. Is there any hope then of further sacrifice for sin? St. Paul has already declared that there is not, and he now repeats that declaration. Nothing then remains, as has been already set forth, but the revelation of the Saviour "in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." That shall be indeed "the great day of his wrath;"² the indignation which devoured Jerusalem was only a feeble type of its terrors.

There are those however who assert the contrary. The apostate Church of Rome, not satisfied with enjoining the repetition of sacrifices for the salvation of the faithful, presumes in direct contradiction to the text before us, to minister a false peace to those who have lived in wilful sin. She promises that after death masses shall be said for their souls, and that these masses shall deliver them from the cleansing fires of purgatory. Her traditions have in this instance, completely made void the solemn, apostolic word which we are now considering. It declares expressly that for wilful sin there remains no more sacrifice, and speaks of a fire which devours. But these traditions declare as expressly that further sacrifice does remain, and speak of a fire which purifies.

It is not enough however, that we are aware of her errors: let us lay to heart the truth which in contradiction to them we profess to believe. We say that there is no sacrifice if that which was offered on the cross be rejected, and no purgatorial fire. We say that there are only two classes, those on the one hand, who believe in God, and have received Christ's Spirit of love into their hearts, and are walking as his obedient children; and those on the other, who have not believed in his love, have not received his Spirit, and are not walking in his pure and holy ways. We say further that the one class are on their way to the glories of his

¹ II Thessalonians i. 7, 8.

² Revelation vi. 17.

kingdom; and that every step which is taken by the other, is bringing them nearer and yet nearer to the miseries prepared for his foes. Surely then we ought to inquire seriously and earnestly to which of these classes we belong. Let us ask this question and find a true answer to it while it is called to-day: to-morrow may be too late for ever. It is not our baptism, our Churchmanship, or our attendance on ordinances which shall save us. Salvation is an internal thing; it is communion with God begun now, to be perfected hereafter in glory. May God grant unto us, through faith of his holy gospel, to prove the blessedness of this communion, and to look forward even here on earth, to its joyful consummation in Heaven!

LECTURE III.

Hebrews x. 28—31.

"He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace? For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

IN these verses, the Apostle pursues his argument. He has warned the members of the Hebrew Church in the verses immediately preceding, that if they should then apostatize from Christ, they should be overtaken and devoured by that vengeance which was just about to alight on their unbelieving countrymen. And now, to impress this warning the more, he refers in proof of its truth, to God's dealings with their nation in ages past and to his threatenings against the breakers of his covenant recorded by their own Moses, in their own venerated Scriptures. The passage is replete with instruction. It will elucidate its meaning to consider it first, in its application to the Hebrews, and second, in its application to ourselves.

I. Let me begin by attempting a paraphrase of the argument. Our unbelieving countrymen, says St. Paul, have trodden under foot the Son of God, by nailing him as a malefactor to the accursed tree; nay they still tread him

under foot, by rejecting his mercy, and counting that precious blood which was shed by their wicked hands a vile and worthless thing. They have also done and are still doing despite to the Spirit of grace, by impiously ascribing to the power of Satan His miraculous witness to the Messiahship of the Saviour. And if we who have known Jesus of Nazareth to be indeed the Messiah promised to the fathers, shall fall back now into the ranks of these his bitter and unrelenting enemies, we shall consent to this enormous wickedness and justify them in all which they have done. We shall declare by this act our conviction that the Son of God was a deceiver, and that the cross was his deserved doom. We shall declare also that the precious blood in which we professed to find peace of conscience and which was the seal of our consecration to the service of God, was the vile and worthless blood of one who thus deserved to die. We shall declare finally, that the miraculous witness of the Holy Ghost which wrought in our minds the conviction of his Messiahship, has been discovered by us to be deceit and delusion, the fruit of Satanic agency. Now you know, dear brethren, continues the Apostle, that the despiser of the law of Moses died without mercy if two or three witnesses testified to his guilt. And I leave yourselves to judge, whether he who thus avenged the least breach of the legal covenant, can be expected to pass by such an offence as this against his blessed gospel. He will not pass it by, it shall be visited with "much sorer punishment;" Moses himself has told us in God's name, that vengeance is his and that he will recompense. He has told us also that the Lord shall judge his people. Do not think then to escape; though you are his people both by circumcision and by baptism, you shall assuredly find if you thus provoke him, that it is a fearful thing to fall into his hands.

I have already remarked that the primary reference of these words was to the then impending destruction of Jerusalem. If further proof of this were wanting, we have it in the quotation from the Old Testament which is here adduced by St. Paul. The words quoted occur in the

famous song of Moses. That song contains a prophecy of all the evils which should befall the Jewish nation till the time of their final destruction; for it speaks of the bringing in of the Gentiles to supply their place as the covenant-people of God. Moreover the threatenings here referred to, are uttered in God's name, just before the Gentiles are called to glorify him for this amazing mercy. And these threatenings accordingly found their accomplishment in the awful events which preceded and attended Israel's final off-casting. God did indeed shew then that vengeance and recompense were his; he did indeed then judge his people; he did indeed then give signal demonstration that it was a fearful thing to fall into his hands. In accomplishment of the prophetic words of Moses, uttered just before and in connection with this song, he beckoned for the Roman eagles "from the end of the earth;" and coming at his command, they clustered round his once holy but then apostate and devoted city. And the miserable people of Israel, besieged in all their gates, were constrained, in fulfilment of the same prophetic words, to eat the fruit of their own bodies, the flesh of their sons and of their daughters; and even "the tender and delicate woman" among them ceased at last to shudder at this dreadful nourishment. Nor were their miseries even then terminated. When Jerusalem had fallen and salt had been sown upon her site, those who survived of her inhabitants were sent to the slave-markets of Egypt, in still further fulfilment of the words of their inspired seer, and sent too in such multitudes that no one would buy them.¹ Now you know, my brethren, says St. Paul, in language which is a singular proof of the veneration of the Hebrews for Moses,—you know who has warned us of these things,* and you see already their begun accomplishment, even "the day approaching." Make not this then, I

¹ Deuteronomy xxviii. 49—68. xxxii. 1—43. Romans xv. 9—12.

* I believe that the words "him that hath said" refer to Moses and not to God. It would be mere tautology to say, "God hath said, I will recompense, saith the Lord." But it was no tautology to remind a Hebrew that this Divine threatening was recorded against him by his own venerated Prophet and Mediator. John v. 45—47.

conjure you, the time when you fall back from Christ, lest being numbered among his enemies you experience with them, what a fearful thing it is to do with him when he is angry.

These things shew us what the sin was which filled up the measure of Israel's provocation, and brought down God's vengeance on the Jewish people. It is commonly said that it was their crucifixion of the Saviour which did so. This is a mistake. The wickedness of that act was indeed enormous, but God was able to forgive it and did forgive it to thousands: many are now in heaven who assisted with impious hands, in nailing the blessed Jesus to the tree. Yea all his murderers might now have been there as far as the will of God was concerned, for there was no exclusion on his part; forgiveness of that and of every other sin was, by the Saviour's express command, preached first of all in Jerusalem.¹ And though as they led him to the Cross, he had warned them of the coming vengeance, that vengeance, to give them space for repentance, was delayed for forty years. But their doom was sealed by their misuse of this Divine forbearance. As if it was not enough to have crucified the blessed One, they reviled him as a deceiver when after his ascension he was declared to them as the Son of God. As if it was not enough to have shed his precious blood, they blasphemed it as the blood of a malefactor when the mercy which it had purchased was pressed on their acceptance by his apostles. And as if it was not enough to have laid violent and wicked hands on him in defiance of the miraculous witness of the Holy Ghost to his true character and his claims on their regard, they continued, after he rose from the dead and had ascended, to treat that witness with contempt and to reject him as their Saviour. This was their crowning sin; these were the offences which God could not and would not pardon. He could have passed by their murder of his beloved One; but he could not pass by their rejection of the mercy which had been purchased for them at the price of his precious blood. It was by this that they

¹ Luke xxiv. 47.

brought down on themselves the terrible weight of his wrath; for no wrath is so terrible as wrath for rejected mercy.

II. Let us now consider the text for our own instruction and warning. St. Paul sets out by reminding us that the breach of the old covenant was a capital offence, and by proving from this very circumstance, that the breach of the new covenant is also capital. This all-important and most solemn statement demands our attention in the first place. We are naturally led to inquire in the second place, what the breach of the new covenant is. And these two things duly considered will prepare us to understand in the third place, the principle on which the judgment of the baptized shall proceed, and the reason of the awful language of threatening with which the text concludes.

1st. If any of the circumcised people violated knowingly and wilfully the least of the enactments of Moses, he was adjudged to death without mercy. It could not be otherwise under that dispensation; for there was no mercy "without shedding of blood,"¹ and it provided sacrifices for sins of ignorance and inadvertence only. With respect to intentional offences the commandment was express,—“the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, the same reproacheth the Lord, and that soul shall be cut off from among his people, because he hath despised the word of the Lord.” This scripture may teach us the meaning of the text. To despise the law of Moses, was to violate intentionally even the least of its provisions. And the sanction of death which was annexed to such violation, was no idle word. In the context immediately subsequent to the scripture just quoted, we are told of an Israelite who was found gathering sticks on the sabbath. “And all the congregation stoned him with stones, and he died; as the Lord commanded Moses.”² We have already seen the reason of the severity of this sanction, the covenant between God and the circumcised was struck over the slain sacrifice. Now this may explain to us the reasoning of St. Paul. If the breach of the old covenant was capital, the breach of the new, he argues, must be also

¹ Hebrews ix. 22.

² Numbers xv. 30—36.

capital. For the baptized, the subjects of the new covenant, have sworn to be God's people over the slain sacrifice of his Son. But his reasoning is from the lesser to the greater; he appeals to us whether the breaker of the new covenant is not worthy of much sorer punishment. The superiority of the new covenant to the old is one reason of this aggravation of guilt. Instead of the love which delivered the circumcised out of the hand of their oppressors, we have been privileged with the love which gave the Son of God to die. Instead of the blood of bulls and goats to expiate ceremonial guilt, we have been privileged with the blood of Jesus which "cleanseth from all sin." And instead of laws and enactments graven on tables of stone, we are privileged with the precious promise that God will put his laws into our minds and write them on the tables of our hearts. And therefore, while the circumcised, for the breach of their covenant, were visited with the death of the body, the baptized shall be delivered for their rebellion into the bitter pains of eternal death. The text mentions also another reason. The sins of baptized men are committed against the persons of the blessed Trinity, whose names are the seals of the baptismal covenant. To tread under foot the Son of God, is an offence against the Father who sent him; to count the blood which sanctifies us an unholy thing, is an offence against the Son who shed it; to do despite to the Spirit of grace, is an offence against the Holy Ghost. Our baptismal vows were indeed taken for us when we were incapable of understanding what was done; but we have now grown to years and have continued to abide in God's Church; and by this act we have taken them on ourselves. And if therefore instead of fulfilling them, we shall be found at last to have been despisers of God's love and rejecters of his mercy, and to have grieved and vexed and resisted his holy Spirit, we shall be adjudged to death as breakers of the Christian covenant. When a Jew was thus adjudged, two or three witnesses testified against him. It shall be the same with us who are called by the name of Christ. Three witnesses shall testify to our guilt, even the persons of the blessed

Trinity whose servants we declared ourselves to be; and at the mouth of these three witnesses shall our eternal doom be sealed.

2nd. But we have spoken of the breach of the Christian covenant only in general terms: let us now inquire particularly what it is. The text and context if compared together, make this matter very plain. It is wilful sin, after having received the knowledge of the truth. I say wilful sin, "for there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." But the sin of the true Christian is of infirmity and not of intention; it is resisted, mourned over, and humbly confessed to God. To sin wilfully on the other hand is to do so with the eyes open, and of deliberate, settled purpose. Now this is the character of the sin of every man, till he is brought truly to believe on the Saviour. Let us look at the grosser forms of transgression, falsehood, theft, adultery and murder. Surely those who commit such things are aware that they are sinning. Again, let us look at the sins of the heart, avarice, ambition and worldliness in all its forms. Surely conscience warns those who surrender themselves to the dominion of these worldly lusts, that they are doing that which is displeasing to God. But notwithstanding this warning, and though they have heard, as was pointed out in the last lecture, of the love of God and of his mercy in Jesus Christ, men continue with their eyes open, in these several courses of transgression. We have already seen that one act of such contempt of God was a breach of the former covenant, and was unpardonable through the provisions of that covenant. We have reason to return thanks that it is not so under the Christian covenant: if it were, no flesh could be saved. But still there is a striking similarity in this respect between the old covenant and the new; for while one act of wilful sin was the breach of the first, wilful sin persevered in is the breach of the second. It has been already declared that such perseverance is an offence against the blessed Trinity. Let us now give to this solemn statement the special consideration which it deserves.

The Son of God laid down his precious life on our

behalf, not merely that he might save us from the pains of hell, but "that he might bring us to God," and lead us in his holy ways. We are told expressly by St. Peter that he "bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness."¹ When we apprehend this as the purpose of his death and yield ourselves to his gracious guidance, we are delivered from the power of sin and are enabled to walk with God. But when on the other hand, we wilfully and deliberately persevere in serving those sinful lusts from which Jesus died to set us free, we are guilty in so doing, of treading our Saviour under foot. History tells us that when on one occasion the Roman army was seized with panic-fear and prepared themselves for flight, their leader threw himself in the path, and exclaimed that he who would flee, must tread upon the body of his general. And the soldiers who had forgotten for a moment the shame which was attached to cowardice, were withheld from their purpose by respect for their commander's person. This is a faint illustration of what we are now considering. Sin is rebellion against God our Creator. Viewed even in this light, it is well called in Scripture "that shameful thing;" it is the everlasting reproach of the creature, that he has broken his allegiance to the Author of his being. But the death of the Son of God to turn us from sin, has imparted to it a much more fearful character. To continue in it now, is not to outrage our Creator only; it is to trample also on our Divine Redeemer.

And it is not less true that by wilful sin, we declare that in our judgment the blood of the covenant is an unholy thing. The word in the text which is translated unholy, might have been rendered common; it signifies something of no efficacy, no significancy, no value. We profess to think very differently of the blood of Jesus. We declare our faith in it as having taken away our sins; we also say that it has given us peace with God, and has laid on us the obligation of being his faithful servants. And St. Paul therefore calls it in the text, the blood wherewith we were

¹ I Peter ii. 24.

sanctified, i. e. consecrated to God. But all this is mere lip-homage if the tenor of our lives denies it. And the man whose life is a course of wilful sin, most emphatically denies it. He declares openly that in his judgment the blood of Christ has conferred on him no benefit, and laid on him in consequence no obligation of being God's devoted servant; that he is just as much at liberty to serve the world and Satan as if that blood had not been shed and that vow had not been laid on him. It is not necessary to point out the dreadful dishonour which such behaviour does to God. Men do not regard their own covenants in this light. The man who for many years has been addicted to drunkenness, is induced to take a pledge to abstain; and however much inclined he may feel afterwards to the vicious indulgence, a regard to his honour and to his plighted word withholds him. The same man during all the years in which he was the slave of this abominable sin, was perfectly aware that he had solemnly vowed in baptism to be God's faithful servant, and was equally aware that the blood in which he professed to believe, laid on him the obligation of diligently performing this vow. What then is the language of his conduct? I am reformed now, he says, because I have vowed to man and consider myself pledged in honour to keep my word: I was vicious before, because I had vowed to God only; and that vow is a matter of form, a common thing. What is called the temperance-movement looked at in the light of these remarks, teaches us a humbling and fearful lesson. We are told that by the virtue of the temperance-pledge millions of the intemperate have been reclaimed from vice, and made good members of society; nay the music, the banners, the decorations and all the accompaniments of a temperance-festival proclaim this as a matter of boast. But let us take heed of what we boast. In the present instance we are boasting in our shame; every such festival proclaims openly that the covenants of men have exercised a power over us which was never exercised by the covenant of the Lord our God. It is indeed so. I have heard ministers of Christ commend this movement, because, they said, it had

reclaimed many who had listened for years to the appeals and warnings of the gospel, and listened in vain. And I do not mean to discommend it : I only ask what is the condition God-ward of a generation which is so reclaimed? Surely God will bring it up in judgment, proving out of their own mouths and by those very acts in which they gloried, that the precious blood of his covenant of peace was counted by his baptized people as a common thing. I am the more emboldened to say this, because I find the prophet Jeremiah making the very same use of the same circumstance in his day ; reading from it to the circumcised, the very lesson concerning their state God-ward and their desert of Divine judgment, which I have now endeavoured to read to the baptized. He tells us that by God's express command, he took "the whole house of the Rechabites" and "set pots full of wine" before them, and bade them drink. But they refused to drink, telling him that Jonadab the son of Rechab their father had said to them, "ye shall drink no wine, neither ye, nor your sons for ever." Shortly after this singular occurrence the word of the Lord came to the prophet. "Go," he said, "tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem...the words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, that he commanded his sons not to drink wine, are performed...NOTWITHSTANDING I HAVE SPOKEN UNTO YOU, BUT YE HEARKENED NOT UNTO ME." After shewing to his people from this simple circumstance, their revolted and rebellious condition, the God whose covenant they had broken, proceeded to threaten judgment. "Thus saith the Lord God of hosts, the God of Israel," is the word, "I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, all the evil that I have pronounced against them...because the sons of Jonadab have performed the commandment of their father, but this people hath not hearkened unto me."¹ Now, though I do not mean to compare this circumstance in all respects, with what is passing before our eyes at present, the moral lesson of both is the same. God did not discommend the Rechabites for their abstinence ; but he pointed to that

¹ Jeremiah xxxv.

abstinence as the reproach of his covenant-people. And while we express no opinion unfavourable to the temperance-cause, we may point to its success in Europe and in America, as the most fearful sign which the present day exhibits, that the blood of God's precious covenant is counted by the baptized everywhere a worthless and common thing.

Wilful sin, besides all this, does despite to the Spirit of grace. Baptism in the name of the Holy Ghost has laid on us the obligation to hearken to him; and he testifies against sin and commands us to walk in righteousness. If then we choose the way of sin and refuse the way of righteousness, we do despite to our gracious monitor, and follow their example of whom God said of old, "my Spirit shall not always strive with man."^a Nor is this all: the Holy Ghost is "the Spirit of grace; and that grace was sealed to us in baptism, as the gift and promise of God, to enable us to walk in his ways. We have the assurance of the blessed Trinity in whose name we were baptized, to this consoling truth. "If ye, being evil," says JESUS, "know how to give gifts unto your children, how much more shall your heavenly FATHER give THE HOLY SPIRIT to them that ask him!"^b It is indeed a very easy thing to raise metaphysical difficulties on this subject. But in expounding Scripture we have nothing to do with such difficulties; our object is simply the statement of practical truth. And the practical truth of this matter is that God holds every baptized man responsible for the Holy Ghost. The day is at hand moreover, when this shall be made manifest in the sight of assembled worlds. When Christ shall take his seat as Judge and lay bare the secrets of all hearts, it shall be found that every baptized man who has lived and died a wilful sinner has enabled himself so to act by resisting, grieving, and quenching that blessed Spirit who would have led him in the way of everlasting life.

3rd. These remarks will enable us to understand what yet remains to be considered, viz. what is that sin which will prove emphatically the condemnation of those who have been

^a Genesis vi. 3.

^b Luke xi. 13.

privileged with the new covenant, in the day when the Lord shall judge his people and make manifest to all that vengeance and recompense are his. The greatest sin beyond all question, which was ever committed on the earth, was the murder of the Son of God. But we have seen already that the Father who loved him, was able to forgive that sin, and that forgiveness of it was proclaimed by his express commandment: we have also seen that those who heard that proclamation perished by rejecting it. This appears to me to throw light of the most important kind on the point which is now before us. It explains also that much contested declaration of our Lord, "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men; but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men."¹ That blasphemy is the persevering rejection of what is emphatically the witness of the Holy Ghost, viz. the blessed Gospel. Our Lord's meaning therefore seems to be this; whatever sin or blasphemy a man may have been guilty of, let him return to God, and it shall be forgiven; but he who rejects the only means of return, and refuses the only way of reconciliation, shall never find forgiveness world without end. Unbelief then, or rejection of Christ is the unpardonable sin, and shall be the condemnation of those who have been privileged with the gospel. It is not difficult to discern the righteousness of God in this. Every Divine act is necessarily holy: and the same character must attach to the Divine forgiveness; God in forgiving, must have a holy purpose. This purpose has been already explained: he forgives, to bring us to himself and to teach us his righteous ways. If therefore we refuse to come to him and determine to abide in sin, it is impossible, from the very nature of God's mercy, that we should ever be made partakers of it. For continuance in sin frustrates the purpose of that mercy; if it could be extended to us notwithstanding our rebellious condition, the blessed gospel would be the ministration of unrighteousness. The parable of the prodigal son is a most beautiful and touching illustration of the dealings of God in this respect.

¹ Matthew xii. 31.

The son returned and there was no upbraiding for the past; the joyful father clothed him with the best robe, put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet, and called on his household to rejoice and be glad. And it is even so with the Lord our God, when his prodigals return to him; he "giveth liberally, and upbraideth not."¹ But even the tender father of the parable would have had a cause for upbraiding, if his rebellious child had dared to tell him that he relished the company of harlots and the feeding of swine more than his society, and that he would not return to his paternal home. Now this is the very answer which the unbelieving return to God. We read accordingly of him who upbraideth not, that he "began to upbraid the cities wherein most of his mighty works were done;" and let us mark the reason, "because they repented not."² For the creature's refusal to accept his Maker's peace because he dislikes his Maker's blessed service, is the cause of this Divine severity. Wee be to the man who in that awful day in which "every one of us shall give account of himself to God,"³ has this reason to assign for his continuance in wilful sin! He shall find to his everlasting sorrow, that it is indeed "a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." It is an easy matter to find excuses for sin now. Some plead their inclination as their excuse; others say that they are so engrossed with the business and cares of life, that they cannot fix their thoughts on Divine and eternal things; and all say that they cannot help the hardness of their hearts, or ameliorate the depravity of their natures. But though these excuses pass current now, they will not abide for a moment, the searching examination of the eternal Judge. It is indeed needless to say this; for none will dare to prefer them. I have often been peculiarly struck with the nervous language used on this subject by Richard Baxter, that most eminent of practical divines. "Make ready now," he says, "thy strongest reasons, and stand up then before the Judge, and plead like a man for thy fleshly, thy worldly and ungodly life; but know that thou must have One to plead with that will not be outfaced by

¹ James i. 5.² Matthew xi. 20.³ Romans xiv. 12.

thee, nor so easily put off as we thy fellow-creatures." These words contain awful truth, for it is "THE LORD" that "shall judge his people."

Let us lay these solemn things to heart. We shall all, in a little while, be in the eternal world; we shall all, very shortly, know by personal experience, what it is to have to do with "the living God." The time now allotted to us, is too short to be wasted and worse than wasted in the pleasures of sin; it is too short to be exclusively devoted to the business of this present life: it is too short to be dissipated in frivolous gaiety and idle mirth. For it is but for a moment, and the eternity which succeeds it, shall never end. He alone then is truly happy, he alone is truly wise, whose only care in this world, is to be found ready for the world to come. May God, of his infinite mercy, grant this wisdom to us all!

LECTURE IV.

Hebrews x. 32—39.

“But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.”

THE Hebrews have been exhorted, as we have seen, not to forsake their faith because of the fear of man; they have been reminded, that though his wrath may be terrible, it is not to be compared to the wrath of God. And now, lest they should be discouraged, feeling, as it were, that they were placed between two kinds of suffering, having only the liberty of choice granted to them, the Apostle proceeds in the verses which we have just read, to remind them of what they had themselves experienced, viz. that the support and consolation which God vouchsafes to those who suffer for him, and the hope of glory with which he inspires them, are

sufficient to sustain the heart under the most accumulated afflictions, nay even to change the character of affliction itself. He therefore beseeches them not to cast away that confidence which in times past they had reposed on the Lord; a confidence which had sustained under former trials, and would assuredly sustain to the end. The Lord's promises, he tells them, are near to be fulfilled, but patience and faith are for the present the Christian's appointed lot. He assures them that this faith shall be rewarded with eternal life; he warns them again in the most solemn manner, that perdition shall be the recompense of unbelief. And he then concludes, by expressing his charitable hope that both he and they were determined against apostacy, and would cleave to Jesus, to the saving of their souls.

Such is a general sketch of the contents of these eight verses, but they will amply repay a much more detailed consideration. We shall therefore examine them separately; and whilst we view them in their application to those to whom they were originally addressed, we shall be profited, I trust, as we proceed, by the catholic instruction which they contain.

But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions.

The former days which he here bids them call to remembrance, were the days when they were first enlightened in the knowledge of Jesus, and taught to embrace him as their Saviour. That illumination, he reminds them, had been followed by a great fight of afflictions; but the consolations of the light which had shone into their hearts from above, had enabled them to endure these afflictions. Two subjects of consideration are presented to the mind by this statement. Let us take them in order.

I. The illumination of the Hebrews had been the occasion of their afflictions; they came upon you, says St. Paul, "after ye were illuminated." Satan the god of this world, is the prince of darkness. "We wrestle not," says, the Apostle

elsewhere, "against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world."¹ "Giving thanks unto the Father," he says again, "who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son."² For darkness is ignorance; and Satan's dominion over men is founded on ignorance. He keeps them as his servants by keeping from them the knowledge of God, of his mercy, of his relation to them, and of his claims on their regard. He keeps them in ignorance of themselves also, and of the end for which they were created; he keeps them in ignorance of sin, and of that dreadful wrath which has been revealed from heaven against it. And as long as he can prevail to detain the human spirit in this bondage, so long he is secure of his prey. Perhaps there never was a time when this ignorance was so profound, and when Satan's kingdom seemed in consequence so firmly established, as when our Saviour himself appeared. Darkness that might be felt brooded at that period from one end of the earth to the other. The Jews had corrupted the true religion, and it emitted scarcely a ray of light: the Gentiles were sunk in the grossest idolatry and most debasing superstition. That however was the season chosen by God for proclaiming to man his long-forgotten Creator, and startling him from his lethargic sleep, by the words of life and immortality. And as this his blessed light began to pierce the darkness, and to turn, as it did so, heart after heart to himself, Satan began to lose his subjects, for multitudes deserted his banner daily and flocked to the service of the Prince of life. The Prince of darkness began in consequence to tremble. He knew that the progress of this light would be the ruin of his kingdom; he knew that in the question between God and him, if reason, right, and justice were heard, his claims to man's obedience could not be advocated for an instant; he knew that if the true character of sin were once discovered, by the revelation in the heart of man of the goodness of him who had formed him for immortality, no fair and honest plea could, for a

¹ Ephesians vi. 12.² Colossians i. 13.

moment, be urged on its behalf. This fully explains his hellish fury against those who embraced this light of God. It explains his rage against the Hebrews, and the afflictions which he brought upon them; for they, as we shall see, were the first to embrace this light, the first to be "illuminated." The means which Satan employed against them, were worthy of himself. Unable to meet the light, he sought to extinguish it by brutal violence, by cruelty, and by bringing upon those who had embraced it, every form of suffering which can try the constancy of the human heart. He hoped, by the use of such means, at once to deter from embracing it, those who were yet in darkness, and to drive the illuminated back into darkness again.

II. But in this, his malice was disappointed; the light which had shone into the hearts of the illuminated gave them strength to endure; "after ye were illuminated, ye endured." The Hebrews, as St. Paul reminds them in these words, upheld by the power of faith and love, had become the example of all who should come after, by abiding, undismayed, the onset of their terrible enemy. The struggle which followed is well called "a great fight." But it was not like the battles of this world; there was no meeting of blow with blow, or returning of violence with violence. There was on the one hand, unrelenting cruelty, and on the other, patient, uncomplaining suffering; it was a fight "of afflictions." The arena of that struggle was the Roman Empire. On the one side was the devil, wielding the whole power of this world, and using as his willing servants, first, Jewish high-priests, and after them Gentile emperors, kings, proconsuls. On the other side were the people who knew the Lord, knew that the Lord was with them, and were confident that he would recompense their pains with eternal life. The question was, which of these should conquer; and upon the issue of that question it depended whether the world was to be privileged with God's gospel, or Satan was to have it for his own. Now the Hebrews had led the van in this glorious struggle, for the blessed gospel was first preached and first embraced in Judea; and against them, in

consequence, the first rage of Satan was directed. We have an account of this in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. Of the early Hebrew Church came the first sufferer for Christ unto death, that noble martyr St. Stephen ;

“———whose eagle eye
 Could pierce beyond the grave ;
 *Who saw his Master in the sky,
 And called on Him to save.”

The writer of the words before us was one of those who consented to that martyr's death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.¹ And not content with having done so, he proceeded from that bloody scene to acts of similar violence, lending himself as the willing instrument of the Jewish priesthood in the dreadful persecution which followed. He had thus been an eyewitness of that heroic endurance of affliction which had marked the Hebrews in the days of their first light and love, and of which he here reminds them for their encouragement under similar trials. And St. Luke bears the same testimony. He tells us that after that whirlwind had spent its first fury, and when in the providence of a gracious God, the Churches in Judea and Galilee had rest and breathing time, so far from being wasted and destroyed, they were found “walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost,” edified and multiplied.² And their noble example was followed by the Churches among the Gentiles; the fight of afflictions continued, but tyranny, violence and bloody cruelty were found no match for the sustaining promises and upholding grace of God.

The Prince of darkness is the same from age to age. His hatred of God's light is the same; and when he is permitted in God's providence, he resorts to the same means of crushing it. That light at the period of the blessed Reformation, began once more to pierce the horrid gloom, and violence and cruelty were, as of old, the weapons of the unholy war which he forthwith waged against it. But

¹ Acts xxii. 20.

² Acts ix. 31.

blessed be God, his malice was again disappointed. As the cry which of old resounded through the Pagan amphitheatres, "The Christians to the lions!" had failed to intimidate the hearts of God's faithful servants; so the kindred cry, "Fire and faggot for the heretics!" failed, through the help of God which was vouchsafed to them, to intimidate our fathers' hearts. They endured in that evil day, they conquered in that bloody fight; and we their children are now enjoying the fruit of their hard-earned victory, for the light of our precious gospel of salvation was the purchase of their blood.

But we wander from the text. The outrageous character of Satan's violence against the Hebrews, and their triumphant victory over his extremest malice, are set forth in the two following verses.

Partly, whilst ye were made a gazing-stock both by reproaches and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

He who is a liar from the beginning, had put it into the hearts of their circumcised brethren, to accuse them of the foulest crimes, to charge them with blasphemy against God, and with wickedness of every description against man. These charges were eagerly believed by the ignorant and prejudiced multitude, who loaded them in consequence with "reproaches," and vexed them with "afflictions." And no eye pitied them, when they were seen to suffer; yea, the man who shed their blood, imagined, as the Saviour had foretold, that he did God service.¹ The calumnies uttered against them were so cruel, and the violence with which they were assailed was so outrageous, that they "were made a gazing-stock." Men wondered at them, not knowing, as a heathen writer says of the early Christians in general, at which to wonder most, the magnitude of their supposed

¹ John xvi. 2.

crimes, or the unheard-of punishment which they endured. Satan hoped by these things, to dismember the body of Christ, to make his people ashamed to acknowledge their brotherhood, and to terrify them from their faith and hope in their Saviour and Lord. But their victory over him had been complete; his malice had been made subservient to the very opposite result. The sufferings of their brethren had excited their sympathy, and quickened their Christian love; so that instead of fearing to acknowledge the persecuted, they increased their own sufferings, by voluntarily becoming "companions of them that were so used." St. Paul himself, before the close of that very persecution in which he had borne a part, had been changed from a persecutor into a preacher of the faith; and when they saw him "in bonds" for the hope of Israel, they had compassion on him and were not ashamed of his chain. And the miseries which they were made to endure, so far from inducing them to forsake the Saviour, had made them only cling the closer to him and to his blessed gospel. When their earthly goods were spoiled, and no portion was left to them save only their hope in Christ, that hope became more precious than it had ever been before. They remembered to their unspeakable consolation, that the treasure which was laid up for them in heaven, was "better" than that of which they were spoiled on earth; and when rude and violent hands seized their earthly goods, they remembered again that what God had provided for them was "enduring," even "a treasure that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth."¹ And filled with the consolation of these hopes, they did more than look with patience on the proceedings of their persecutors, they did more than endure their violence, they "took it joyfully."² They remembered doubtless that Christ had said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven."³ They must have been aware also, as St. Paul

¹ Luke xii. 33.² Matthew v. 11, 12.

told the Thessalonians, that these tribulations were "a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God," that they might "be counted worthy of the kingdom of God."¹ And they must have known besides, that present suffering and trial were the appointed means of preparing them for the glories of that kingdom. St. Paul tells the Corinthians, "Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."² And he assigns this to the Romans, as the reason for taking suffering joyfully, "We rejoice," he says, "in hope of the glory of God: and not only so, but we rejoice in tribulations also; knowing that tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope: and hope maketh not ashamed."³ The Hebrews had also another reason for rejoicing in tribulation; it was endured for the sake of that Divine Saviour who had so well deserved of his Church and of mankind. Their early instructors, St. Peter and St. John, had set this noble example before them when their "fight of afflictions" was beginning, for they departed from the presence of the Jewish Council, "rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."⁴ And those who had the privilege of being instructed by them, were actuated doubtless by the same generous devotion, when they "took joyfully the spoiling of their goods." It is not in human nature to act on such lofty principles; nor will man, left to himself, ever be found forgetting the things of sense and time, and dwelling thus amid the invisible realities of eternity. One word however in the text before us,—*"knowing in yourselves,"* reveals the secret of this joy in tribulation. If the Hebrews had believed that a portion was laid up for them in heaven, on the word of St. Peter or of St. John merely, they would not have been found thus rejoicing. But their faith had a very different ground; they knew that it was so, in themselves. "The anointing which ye have received of him," says St. John himself, "abideth in you, and ye need

¹ II Thessalonians i. 5.

² II Corinthians iv. 17.

³ Romans v. 2—5. original.

⁴ Acts v. 41.

not that any man teach you: but the same anointing teacheth you."¹ That anointing was the spirit of light and love, shed down by Jesus on his people, the illumination mentioned in the text. "For God," says St. Paul, "who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."² This blessed anointing, this blessed illumination, revealing Christ in the heart as the hope of glory, had filled the Hebrews with joy unspeakable; it had given a secret consolation which the world could not take away; it had imparted a life which Satan could not touch, however fiercely and furiously he dealt his blows. He put it into the heart of the heathen magistrates at Philippi, to beat St. Paul and Silas; he inspired the heathen gaoler with his malice, so that, while their wounds were yet bleeding, he "thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks." But his rage could go no further; he could not prevent these persecuted men in the fulness of their peace and joy, from praying at midnight, and singing praises to God.³ He stirred up the cruel Domitian against St. John, and caused him to be banished to the lonely Patmos; but he could not prevent him, while there, from being "in the Spirit on the Lord's day,"⁴ and beholding the visions of the kingdom. Ah,

"The oppressor holds the body bound,
But knows not what a range the spirit takes."

"When he giveth quietness, who then can make trouble?" is the triumphant challenge of God's holy word.⁵ We read in Old-Testament Scripture that "there shall no evil happen to the just;"⁶ we are assured in the kindred language of the New, that "all things work together for good to them that love God."⁷ All this had been matter of experience with those to whom St. Paul was writing. The consolations of God poured into their hearts from above, had altered the very nature of suffering, making it an occasion of joy; their

¹ I John ii. 27. ² II Corinthians iv. 6. ³ Acts xvi. 22-25. ⁴ Revel. i. 10.

⁵ Job xxxiv. 29.

⁶ Proverbs xii. 21.

⁷ Romans viii. 28.

afflictions had quickened faith and love and added new vigour to hope. The malice of the enemy had thus been more than impotent; it had turned to their advantage.

St. Paul therefore adds with reason,—

Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward.

You have confided in the Lord in times past, he would remind them, and he has never failed you. In the sight of afflictions of your former days, you found him at hand to help you; he either caused the tempest to pass by, or gave you strength to abide its fury. Now what you have experienced in the past, you shall experience in the future also: the Lord will never deceive the confidence which you repose on him. Do not act then, I beseech you, as if you suspected that he would; do not cast that confidence away. It brought with it, at the beginning, a "great recompense of reward," even help, strength and abundant consolation. It will bring that recompense still, yea it will bring it to the end: believe therefore and fear not.

We took our afflictions at the first, joyfully, the Hebrews might have answered, but they have now continued so long, that we are weary and fain would rest. To meet this feeling, St. Paul proceeds,—

For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

You are heirs of the kingdom, he would say to them, and it is the will of God that you enter into that kingdom, through much tribulation. You have need therefore of patience, that you may do that will, and at last, receive the promise. Do not murmur, my brethren, that such is the will of God; do not imagine, for a moment, that your afflictions are needlessly protracted. Your faith is much more precious than "gold that perisheth," and must there-

fore be tried, as "with fire," that it may be "found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ."¹ And God would purify you from sin, by the discipline of earthly sorrow, that you may be found meet at last to enter into his heavenly joy. "It became him" who purposed from eternity, to bring "many sons unto glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings."² Let not these many sons murmur if they are perfected in the same way. Jesus, the only-begotten of the Father, "learned obedience by the things which he suffered,"³ and he is "the first-born among many brethren."⁴ Let not us the younger brethren murmur if we must learn it in the same school. We have the promise of being glorified together with him, and of sitting on his throne. Shall we claim this promise, and at the same time, refuse his cross? The cross was his way to the crown; and shall the disciple be above his Master, or the servant above his Lord? Be patient then, my brethren, St. Paul would say; and when you are tempted to impatience, think of the glorious recompense of present suffering, when your Lord, according to his promise, shall come and receive you to himself. And it shall not be long before he fulfils this promise. His coming is fixed in the decree and purpose of God, and in "a little while" he shall appear, for the salvation of them that look for him; for he makes no tarrying, no needless delays. The eternal consolation of his most blessed presence, shall then abundantly recompense your faith and patience, and cause you to forget the short-lived sorrows of time.

Infidelity, let me remark, has impugned this precious scripture, and others of a similar character. Two thousand years have passed, it is triumphantly objected, but the little while assigned by Christ's apostles for the duration of his absence, has not yet expired. The creature presumes to reason in this way, forgetting in his folly, that his little whiles are not the little whiles of his Creator. Man compares time with time; but God compares it with eternity.

¹ I Peter i. 7.

² Hebrews ii. 10.

³ Hebrews v. 8.

⁴ Romans viii. 29.

And therefore a thousand years appear no more to him, than yesterday or a watch in the night appears in our eyes.¹ He would fix the attention of his people on the blessed hope of their Saviour's eternal presence with them; he would remind them, that in comparison with that endless consolation, the period of his absence is only a little while. This is evidently the meaning of St. Paul in the words before us. You complain, he says, that you are persecuted and afflicted, and you say that the time is long. But let me remind you, brethren, that the whole duration of the reign of Satan, sin, and death, is but a little while, compared with the eternal life which awaits its revelation at the appearing of Jesus Christ. To this the impatience of human nature would reply, Why then does he not appear? I conceive that the expression "will not tarry" was designed to silence this querulous impatience. For its meaning appears to be, He has a wise reason for not appearing yet, he is not slack, he has not forgotten. And it was indeed so. If God had listened to the impatient desire of the Hebrews and of all the early churches, and brought his Son again to the earth in their day, it is needless to say that we must have been forgotten: we could not have been brought on the stage of time; we could not have been grafted into Christ; we could not have been prepared for glory. And this reads to us in our day, a lesson of solemn rebuke. We search the prophetic Scriptures, and are dazzled with their visions of glory. And we are apt to ask in querulous impatience, Why does not the counsel of the Holy One make haste?—why does the Lord delay to bring in his kingdom? But ah, we know not what precious interests would be sacrificed, were the Lord to come a single hour before the time appointed of the Father. There are thousands yet unborn, whose eternal happiness is as dear to God, as ours is; and the kingdom cannot be revealed, till they are ready to enter into it. Our Church reminds us of this, in teaching us to pray that God would accomplish the number of his elect, and hasten his kingdom. He hears that prayer of his

¹ Psalm xc. 4.

gracious goodness. And when his people, after it is granted, look back from the glories of eternity, on the whole course which time has run, they shall justify the truth of their God; it has been indeed but a little while, they shall say; our Lord has come quickly, he has not tarried.

St. Paul next reminds the Hebrews of the character which marks the true Christian's present course, and of its joyful issue. He also places in contrast with this, the sin and punishment of the apostate:—

Now the just shall live by faith: but if HE draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

These words, with those of the preceding verse, are a quotation from the Septuagint version of the prophet Habakkuk,¹ and were most applicable to the spiritual condition of those whom the Apostle was addressing. The Hebrews, as has been already mentioned, having now become weary of suffering, were impatient for the appearing of Christ; they were also tempted, because of the delay, to forsake the profession of his name. But you forget, says St. Paul, what your own Scriptures teach you, viz. that the condition of the just man in this present world, is one of faith and hope. Now "we hope for that we see not...for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"² You would see your Saviour in the clouds; God bids you believe and wait for him. Moreover, the just man lives by this faith. It sustains him now amid tribulation, affliction, and sorrow; it shall bring him hereafter to the enjoyment of life that knows no end. You shall find it so, my brethren, if you continue to make him your confidence. But if on the other hand, you draw back from that faithful Saviour who has never left you in any past tribulation, helpless and desolate, and will not leave you now, oh remember the awful word, "My soul shall have no pleasure in him." God has no pleasure in those who thus prefer time to eternity; who prefer the short-lived praise of man to his everlasting commendation; who think the king-

¹ Habakkuk ii. 3, 4.

² Romans viii. 24, 25.

dom so little worthy of their regard, that for the tribulations of an hour, they turn back from seeking after it. You may thus obtain a momentary peace; but it will be dearly purchased by enduring sorrow, for you shall be sent away as reprobates from the presence of the eternal Judge.

Having uttered such fearful language, the Apostle hastens to add,—

But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

There is much tenderness in these words. The Apostle, in the fulness of his charity, joins their names with his own; we, he says, are not of them who draw back, but of them that believe. I have warned you of the consequences of apostacy, he would say, but you and I, let me hope, are of a different mind. We have determined, I trust, not to forsake our Saviour, but purpose by God's grace, to believe in him to the end. We have proved together the depths of affliction and sorrow; we have proved together the power of faith to uphold. And we shall also prove together, I trust, the riches of that salvation which is faith's eternal recompense, when it shall be given to us to rejoice around our common Saviour's throne. "Wherefore comfort one another with these words."

Let us now, before dismissing this precious subject, seek to learn the great lesson which it teaches us. The spirit of genuine Christianity appears in a very striking light in the verses which we have now been considering. It is a spirit of JOY. When the Hebrews were illuminated, they endured a great fight of afflictions, and took joyfully the spoiling of their goods. It is a spirit of LOVE. When they saw their brethren suffer, they voluntarily acknowledged them, and became partners with them in their sufferings. It is a spirit of HOPE. They endured the spoiling of their earthly goods, because they looked for a heavenly inheritance, the inheritance which is to be revealed at the appearing of Jesus Christ. It is a spirit of PATIENT OBEDIENCE. St. Paul

declares expressly that in patient doing of the Divine will, they must wait for the fulfilment of his promises. And finally, it is a spirit of ABIDING CONFIDENCE IN GOD. The Apostle declares with equal distinctness, that the just man lives by his faith, and that it is by this confidence sustained to the end, that we shall attain to ultimate salvation. God grant that in that glorious day when he shall make up his jewels, and gather his wheat into the garner, we may be found to have been possessed of this Spirit of Christ! "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Instead of being cast away as those in whom He has no pleasure, we shall be admitted into the eternal joy of our Maker's blessed presence. Which may he grant to us of his infinite mercy!

LECTURE V.

Hebrews xi. 1—3.

“ Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen. For by it the elders obtained a good report. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.”

THE great object of St. Paul, since he took leave of doctrinal demonstration, has been to exhort the Hebrews to the steadfast exercise of faith. We have just been considering these exhortations, “let us draw near, in full assurance of faith,—cast not away your confidence,—the just shall live by faith.” He has also been expressing, as we saw in the last lecture, his charitable hope concerning them, “we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them who believe to the saving of the soul.” And he is therefore now led, in the natural progress of his discourse, to give some account of what faith is. He has assured the Hebrews that if they persevered in the exercise of it, they should find strength for doing and suffering God’s will now, and attain to his reward hereafter. And he is therefore also led to adduce for their encouragement, some examples of this consolatory truth, in men of like passions with themselves, who by the power of this holy principle, glorified God both by active obedience and patient suffering, and were rewarded with his approbation. To this twofold object then he devotes the eleventh chapter of this epistle; the opening verses of which we have now read.

Let me give a brief sketch of the contents of these verses. We are told, in the first, what faith is, viz. "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." We are told, in the second, that by it the worthies of former days obtained God's good report. And we are furnished, in the third, with a general illustration of the nature of faith, as confidence in the word of another concerning something not seen by ourselves, by being reminded that it is "through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God," and that "things which are seen, were not made of things which do appear." I need not say that this is most important matter, and that it well deserves our attentive consideration. And besides the importance of these verses in themselves, there is another reason why we should earnestly seek to understand them. They are the key to the chapter which they introduce; what follows being only a comment on the statements which they contain.

We shall now proceed to consider them successively.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

It is a very common sentiment that faith is another name for fidelity; and that when Scripture says that we are saved by faith, the meaning is that salvation is attained by faithfully serving God. Every example of faith recorded in this chapter, demonstrates this sentiment to be erroneous; it is also condemned by implication in the words before us. Fidelity can never be "the substance of things hoped for;" it can never be "the evidence of things not seen." Faith leads indeed to fidelity; but in itself, it is simply BELIEVING SOMETHING TO BE TRUE, ON THE AUTHORITY OF GOD AFFIRMING IT. St. John has shewn this in the most beautiful manner, and yet in language so simple as to be intelligible to the understanding of a child. He tells us that "this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith;" that "he that overcometh the world" is "he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God;" that three Divine witnesses on

earth and three in heaven bear testimony that this is true; that "if we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater, for this is the witness of God;" and that "he that believeth" it not, maketh God "a liar, because he believeth not the witness that God gave of his Son."¹ Now in these words we have the object of faith declared to us, viz. that Jesus is the Son of God. The authority which we have for believing this is also declared, viz. the solemn affirmation of God. Faith and its opposite, unbelief, are then most clearly defined; the one is said to be the belief of this truth on the authority of him who has affirmed it; while the other is said to be the rejection of it, and making him a liar. If this be faith, we can well understand what is declared concerning it in that portion of the text which is now before us. We shall accordingly consider its twofold statement in the light of these words of St. John.

"Things hoped for" are blessings expected but not realized. "We hope for that we see not," says St. Paul; "but hope that is seen, is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?"² The ground of this hope is the word and promise of God; he has assured us that he will bestow these blessings, and therefore we expect them. And faith in his word, as St. Paul here declares, gives to us the substantial enjoyment of these promised blessings, even now, before they are bestowed. Let us take the most confiding of beings, a little child. He cannot conceive it possible that his parents should deceive him; and so, when they promise any indulgence, he has no doubt that they mean to bestow it. Let us mark the effect on the mind of the child, of this faith in the parental word. From the moment that the promise is made to him, he begins to enjoy by anticipation the expected indulgence; he thinks of it by day, he dreams of it by night. His beaming countenance is the most striking of all comments on the text; we cannot look on it without being convinced that faith is indeed the substantial presence of a promised and expected good. And this is not the case

¹ I John v. 4—10. original.

² Romans viii. 24, 25.

with children only; it is the case with us all. The only thing which interferes with our anticipative enjoyment of any promised good, is when we have some reasonable ground for questioning whether it shall really be bestowed on us. If this is not the case, we yield the mind freely to the happiness of expectation, so that in many instances, when the promised good comes, it disappoints us, and the anticipation proves better than the reality. Now the same principle applies to faith in the Divine promises. We have a striking example of this in the words of our Saviour to the Jews. "Abraham your father," he said, "rejoiced to see my day; and he saw it, and was glad."¹ Abraham did not, with his bodily eyes, see the day of Messiah; He was not revealed till many hundred years after the patriarch had slept in peace. But he believed in God's gracious purpose, and the blessings and glories of that day were substantially present, in consequence, to his mental vision; his faith saw them. He had also that anticipative enjoyment of them, of which we have just spoken; he rejoiced to see them, he was glad. And we have what is perhaps a still more striking example of this, in what St. Paul declares concerning the blessed God himself. Abraham, he tells us, was "the father of us all, before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were." And he quotes in striking proof of this the words of God to Abraham, "I have made thee a father of many nations."² He does not say, I will make thee, but I have made thee. Abraham, childless Abraham, was even then, in his sight, the father of many nations; and the innumerable multitudes of his natural and spiritual seed, were as substantially present to the eye of the Eternal, as if they had been, at that moment, existing on the earth. He therefore called the things which were not, as though they were; for he knew his own purposes, and was assured of their fulfilment. Now these purposes are declared to us in his word. And if that word therefore is the object of our faith, we also shall learn to call the things which are not, as though they were; confi-

¹ John viii. 56.² Romans iv. 16, 17.

dence in the Divine veracity, shall impart to future promised good the substantial character of present enjoyment. It was so with the first believers. "God, who is rich in mercy," says St. Paul, "hath quickened us together with Christ, and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."¹ For they realized by faith, even on earth, their future exaltation with their Lord; they were conscious, so to speak, of sitting beside him. And there is no fear, with the Divine promises, of anticipation going beyond reality. When the blessed reality is at length revealed, the most joyful anticipations of the most enraptured believer, shall be left inconceivably behind.

As "the substance of things hoped for," faith has reference to the future only; as "the evidence of things not seen," it has reference to the present also. There are two ways in which we may be made aware of the existence of any thing, viz: by sight or by faith. We may know that the great battle of Waterloo was really fought, because we were present on that memorable and awful occasion. We may know that there is such a country as China, and such a city as Canton, because we have visited China, and walked in the streets of Canton. This is the evidence of sight. But very few of us have such evidence of either of these things. We know that God gave Europe's armed oppressor as the dust to our sword, and as the driven stubble to our terrible artillery, not because we saw it, but because others have reported it to us, and we believe their word. Again, we know that there is such a country as China, and such a city as Canton, though many of us have never set foot beyond the British Isles; others have reported to us the existence of these places, and we believe their word. This is the evidence of faith; faith in the word of another, is in this case, to use the language of the text, "the evidence" to us, "of things not seen." And in matters of human testimony we do not regard this evidence as secondary, but trust to it as implicitly as to the evidence of sight, and act upon this confidence

¹ Ephesians ii. 4-6.

continually. If we were to determine to act otherwise, and to believe in the existence of nothing but what we ourselves had seen, we must needs go out of the world; for scarcely a day passes over our heads in which we are not constrained, in the most important transactions of life, to trust to faith only. Now what applies to human, applies equally to Divine testimony. None of us has seen God at any time, or can see him; none of us was an eye-witness of the awful scenes of Calvary; none of us has ever visited the heavenly world, or can tell from personal observation what is passing there. How then can we assure ourselves that God really loves us? that the blood of his dear Son was shed for us on the bitter cross? that it is now presented on high, and that it procures for us the remission of sin? The answer is obvious; God declares these things to be true, and his word is our evidence of them. And it is a sufficient evidence; "if we receive the witness of men," says St. John, "the witness of God is greater." This then is faith. We see therefore the perfect harmony between St. John and St. Paul. The one Apostle teaches us that faith is receiving God's witness; the other defines it as the substantial enjoyment, even now, of his glorious promises, and the confidence of the soul in the truth of his declarations of grace.

St. Paul makes his meaning yet plainer; for in the last verse of the text to which we shall now turn our attention, he gives a practical illustration of it.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

He appeals to their consciences and experience, and to ours also. We understand, he says, that the worlds were framed by the word of God; i. e. that the visible creation; sun, moon, and stars, earth and ocean, plants and animals, were not formed out of pre-existent matter, but were called out of nothing by the fiat of Omnipotence. But how do we know that this was indeed the case? Where were we when

God laid the foundations of the earth? when he shut up the sea with doors? when he made the cloud the garment thereof, and thick darkness its swaddling band? when the morning stars sang together over his completed creation, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?¹ We were then in our original nothingness. We are not indebted to sight then for this knowledge and understanding; none of us were eye-witnesses of any of these stupendous facts. As little are we indebted to philosophy. Professing themselves to be wise on this subject, the wisest of the heathen became fools.² We are indebted to God's word. He has given to us his living oracles, and in these oracles we read that "God created the heaven and the earth;"—that "God said, let there be light, and there was light;"—that he "said, let the waters be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry-land appear: and it was so;"—that he "said, let there be lights in the firmament of heaven, to divide the day from the night;"—that "he made the stars also."³ And reading these things in God's word, we believe them on God's authority. Now this is faith. We have not the shadow of a doubt concerning these glorious facts of Creation, though we have no evidence of them whatever but the bare affirmation of God. And the same confidence in his veracity—the same faith, when the blessed truths and promises of redemption are its object, is "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

He would shew to them and to us also the power of this blessed principle,—

For by it the elders obtained a good report.

"The elders" of whom he here speaks, were the worthies of all preceding generations, from righteous Abel down to the coming of Messiah. He does not dismiss them with so brief a reference, but enlarges on their history to the close of this long chapter, taking leave of them at the end of it, with the same testimony which he here bears to their

¹ Job xxxviii. 4—9.

² Romans i. 22.

³ Genesis i. 1—16.

worth. The name "elders" is peculiarly appropriate. To use the language of the poet, they were "the world's grey fathers;" and their names and histories are enshrined among the records of hoary antiquity. In the few words which St. Paul here devotes to them, two things appear; and these two things, as illustrative of the power of faith, are worthy of our most most earnest attention.

I. They "obtained a good report." This was not the good report of man. Wealth, honour and advancement wait on that good report; but "they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword: they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth. 'The world was not worthy' of their goodness:" for man knew not how to value it. But they obtained something better than his favour, even THE GOOD REPORT OF GOD. He esteemed what man despised; he also expressed that esteem, and has left the expression on record. Let us glance at the history of these elders, that we may discern the truth of this remark. Abel, Enoch, and Noah are the first names in the honourable roll. And God in his inspired word, has solemnly recorded his approval of each of these sainted men. He has told us of Abel, that when he came with his brother Cain to offer sacrifice, "the Lord had respect unto Abel and to his offering."¹ He has told us of Enoch, that he "walked with God three hundred years;"² and of Noah, that he "was a just man and perfect in his generations," and that he "found grace in the eyes of the Lord."³ Moreover in each of these cases, the Divine approbation was expressed to him who had obtained it. It was expressed to Abel, in the acceptance of his sacrifice; to Enoch, in his translation to glory; and to Noah, in his deliverance from the flood. Following the stream of the Apostle's discourse, we come next to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Time would fail me were I to attempt to recount the many testimonies borne by God in his word to his faithful servant Abraham. Let it suffice that I refer

¹ Hebrews xi. 36—38.² Genesis iv. 4.³ Gen. v. 22.⁴ Gen. vi. 8, 9.

to two of the most remarkable. We find "the Judge of all the earth" saying on the eve of Sodom's fall, "Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?" He also gave his reason for thus admitting a mortal to share his secret counsels; and oh what a testimony to Abraham does that reason contain! "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord."¹ And he bore the same testimony from heaven, when the patriarch at his command was preparing to offer his son on the altar. "Now I know that thou fearest God;" and "By myself have I sworn, that in blessing I will bless thee."² Surely this was obtaining a good report, the only good report which is worthy of a moment's desire. And Isaac and Jacob were heirs in this, as in all other respects, to Abraham's blessing. After father, son, and grandson had for ages slept in peace, we find God declaring himself to Moses, as the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob; yea proclaiming this as the name by which he should for ever be known.³ The Hebrews needed no one to remind them of the distinction thus conferred on the fathers of their nation; and they gloried in the remembrance that God had called that nation "the seed of Abraham my friend."⁴ Nor did they need to be reminded of the good report of another of these elders, their own illustrious Moses. No Hebrew could forget the memorable words "My servant Moses is faithful in all mine house;"⁵ or could forget that it was written in the imperishable record of inspiration, that when the cloudy pillar descended at the tabernacle-door "the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend."⁶ They were also aware that in the same inspired record, God had borne testimony to the holy boldness of Barak and Gideon, of Jepthae and Samson; to the righteousness of Samuel; to the zeal and piety of David; and to the courage and constancy with which many of his servants the prophets had submitted to exile, torture, and death, for the love which they bore to his name. The Hebrews must therefore have

¹ Genesis xviii. 19.² Genesis xxii. 12, 16, 17.³ Exodus iii. 16.⁴ Isaiah xli. 8.⁵ Numbers xii. 7.⁶ Exodus xxxiii. 11.

been perfectly conscious of the truth of the statement before us; their own Scriptures told them that those to whom St. Paul was now referring, had obtained the approbation of God.

II. The way in which they obtained it, is also declared by the Apostle; it was by faith. They believed in God's mercy and trusted in his promises. And this faith enabled them to do his blessed will, in spite of every obstacle and hindrance, as we shall see more fully when we examine their histories in detail. When we consider that they were the few righteous in the midst of the many wicked, we may be assured that these obstacles and hindrances were of the most serious and appalling kind. Abel had to contend with the hatred and violence of Cain; Noah had to endure the taunts of an unbelieving and abandoned generation; whilst Abraham was tried, doubtless, with the opposition of idolatrous kindred, when he turned his back by God's command, on his country and father's house. Nor did Moses overrate the difficulties which were before him, when he besought God at the bush, to lay on another his heavy and responsible task. No language can describe the arduous course of that servant of God, from the day of his entering Egypt to demand the deliverance of Israel, to the day when he laid down his charge and life together, on the borders of the promised land. His spirit was so worn-out with continual anxiety and grief, that he complained to the Lord on one occasion, that his charge was too heavy for him, adding with almost querulous impatience, "kill me, I pray thee, out of hand, and let me not see my wretchedness."¹ And let us consider the task which was assigned to Joshua, to Barak; to Gideon, to Samson; and how inadequate were the means placed at their disposal for its accomplishment. Joshua, with a people unused to war, found himself in the midst of seven warlike nations, nations proverbial for strength and courage;² and had God's command to subdue them. And what were the ten thousand Israelites that followed Barak, to the countless hosts of the Canaanite?³ or the three

¹ Numbers xi. 14, 15.

² Deuteronomy ix. 2.

³ Judges iv. 10, 13.

hundred men of Gideon to a people like the dust of the earth for multitude?¹ or the jaw-bone in the hand of Samson to the veteran and armed warriors of Ekron and of Gath?² But faith triumphed over all these difficulties. God's servants believed in his word and trusted in his promises; and he in whom they trusted, strengthened them in their hour of need, so that one chased a thousand, and two put ten thousand to flight.³ When the world frowned on Moses, "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible;" when it sought to seduce him, he trod it under foot, having "respect unto the recompense of the reward." And we see the same faith teaching Samuel, in a day of priestly profligacy and civil corruption, to walk blameless before God and man, as God's holy priest and Israel's upright ruler.⁴ We see it also in the remnant of faithful witnesses, who in the day of Israel's decline and apostacy, sighed and cried for the abominations that were done,⁵ yea fainted in their sighing and found no rest.⁶ Upheld by him in whom they believed, they maintained their testimony, as men "persecuted but not forsaken," and "cast down but not destroyed," till many of them sealed it with their blood. And St. Paul here reminds us that this goodly company have obtained the recompense which they sought; that having prevailed in the strength of faith, to do and bear God's will, they have been rewarded with his eternal approbation. Be not dismayed then, he would say to the Hebrews, because of your present afflictions; but trust in the same God, and stay yourselves on his eternal promises. So shall you, another day, attain to their recompense; the Saviour shall confess your names with honour, before his Father and before his angels.

Let us now pause and review the contents of the text. We have learned what faith is, and God calls us to its exercise; "BELIEVE ON THE LORD JESUS CHRIST," is the command of the everlasting gospel. Now the first question of every one who is in earnest about salvation, is what shall I believe? The text contains a clear and distinct reply.

¹ Judges vii. 7, 12. ² Judges xv. 15, 16. ³ Deuteronomy xxxii. 30.

⁴ I Samuel xii. 3-5.

⁵ Ezekiel ix. 4.

⁶ Jeremiah xiv. 2.

For it tells us that faith is taking God's word as our evidence of something not seen. And the thing not seen, as is manifest from other scriptures, is the love of God in having sent his Son to die for us; the taking away of sin by Christ's precious blood; and God's mercy in imputing it no more. But the anxious inquirer asks, Is this to me? Yes, my brother, this love and mercy is to thee: the parting charge of the Redeemer, was "preach the gospel to every creature,"¹ and thou art comprehended in that vast commission. If the blessings of eternal mercy are not thine, it can only be through thine own wilful rejection. The same God who says that he created the world and all things therein, and breathed into thy nostrils the breath of life, says also that he has loved thee and given his Son to die for thee, and that in the precious blood of Calvary he is well-pleased to forgive thy sins. Wouldest thou then have faith? Take God's word as thine evidence of these things, and rejoice. It is of vital importance for us to have a clear understanding of this truth. We cannot take one step in truly Christian obedience, without having first attained to confidence in God. But the confidence of many, if its foundation be examined, rests on a hope that they are believers; and if we were only assured that we had faith, they say, we should have no doubt of God's love and mercy. The error of this is manifest in the light of the preceding exposition. The love and mercy of God are the objects of faith, the very things in which we are to believe. And our knowledge of them and consequent confidence in God, must not be derived from previous knowledge of ourselves; it must flow directly from those words of unspeakable compassion which the loving and merciful One has been pleased to address to us in his gospel. This is faith; the substance of the future, as well as the evidence of the present. Believing in our Saviour's love, we love him again, and long for his appearing. And the blessed hope of the crown of righteousness, which the righteous Judge has promised to as many as love that appearing,² lifts our affections above a present world, and imparts to us, even

¹ Mark xvi. 15.² II Timothy iv. 8.

on earth, a foretaste of the joys of heaven. We are preserved moreover, by this faith and hope, amid the changes and chances, the perils and temptations of time, and shall be brought by it at last to the vision of God's glory in eternity.

The love and mercy of God toward us are not occasioned then by our faith. Faith on our part is the reception of them; and receiving them, we live: unbelief is their rejection; and rejecting them, we die. As little are they occasioned by our repentance; "the goodness of God leadeth to repentance."¹ That goodness has no cause but itself: love is the law of God's being; "God is Love."² The gospel is the revelation of this goodness of the Invisible in Jesus Christ his Son. And to believe on Christ is to apprehend this glorious revelation. "This is life eternal," says our Lord himself in solemn prayer to the Father; "that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent."³

We have been instructed also, by the text, in the results and recompense of faith. It must, from its very nature, lead to such results and to such a recompense. God's approbation is necessarily attached to it; he has commanded us to cast ourselves on his mercy in Christ Jesus, and the acceptance with which we are greeted in doing so, is in terms of his own word. This faith will also, of necessity, teach us, as it taught those of whom we have been speaking, to do God's will and to glorify his name. St. Paul tells us elsewhere that it "worketh by love,"⁴ and teaches to "live soberly, righteously, and godly," as Christ's "peculiar people, zealous of good works."⁵ And such a life will in its turn, lead to a blessed recompense; the gracious Saviour cannot and will not forget the service which we thus render to him. He did not forget the services of these elders: the text reminds us that they been rewarded with his eternal approbation solemnly recorded in his word. Who can express the honour which has thus been conferred on them! Generation after generation of the Church has heard their names,

¹ Romans ii. 4.

² I John iv. 8.

³ John xvii. 3.

⁴ Galatians v. 6.

⁵ Titus ii. 12-14.

and read Christ's account of their honourable deeds. And this is but a small thing; their record is on high. The angels before the throne have heard of their love, their labours, and their sufferings; yea God the Father has bent his ear to listen. We have the promise of the same recompense; Jesus says to him that overcometh, "I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels."¹ And if the rapturous word, "Well done, good and faithful servant," is at last addressed to us by him, it shall make us forget for ever all the disappointments, sorrows, and trials of time, and all that we have endured for his sake. Let us covet this distinction then, let us set our hearts on this DEATHLESS HONOUR. Men of like passions with ourselves have obtained it, and it is still THE PRIZE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS. God grant of his infinite mercy that it may be the attainment of us all!

¹ Revelation iii. 5.

LECTURE VI.

Hebrews xi. 4.

"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."

WE learned from the subject of the last lecture, that faith is at once the evidence of things not seen, and the substantial presence of things hoped for: we were also reminded that by the exercise of this grace and by its fruits appearing in their lives, the worthies of earlier generations obtained God's good report. The rest of this chapter is devoted to historical examples, illustrative of both these truths. The first selected by St. Paul, as we have just read, is that of Abel. Having referred to our knowledge of the creation of the world in illustration of the nature of faith, he goes back to the very commencement of human society, for examples, at once of its nature and of the blessed recompense which it infallibly secures. His words suggest three subjects of consideration. We inquire, first, how faith made the offering of Abel more excellent than that of Cain: second, how Abel obtained witness that he was righteous: and third, of what it is that this servant of God, "being dead, yet speaketh" to us. Our answer to the first inquiry will discover the truth of the Apostle's definition of faith; our answer to the second will establish the statement that the Divine approbation is obtained by it: while in answer to the third we shall find that these are the two all-important subjects on which martyred Abel is instructing us from the tomb.

I. The first thing which arrests our attention when we begin to consider the text, is the statement that both Cain and Abel offered a sacrifice to God. We are arrested by the same statement when we turn to the book of Genesis, where we read that "in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof." Now St. John tells us that Cain "was of that wicked one," and that "his works were evil."¹ We should rather therefore have expected to read that Abel drew near to sacrifice to the Lord, but that Cain scornfully refused to accompany him. Such however was not the case, they both drew near. And if we had watched them on that eventful morning as they built their altars and prepared their offerings and bowed the knee, our eye probably could have discovered no difference between the acceptable and the unacceptable worshipper. But the eye of God discerned a difference; he "had respect unto Abel and to his offering: but unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect." In what then consisted this difference? Was Cain deficient in sincerity, or in devotion? No; as far as we know, his sincerity and devotion were equal to his brother's. If it had been otherwise, if he had been either a hypocrite, or a mere formalist, we should not have read, that when God rejected his offering he "was very wroth, and his countenance fell."² The text tells us wherein he was deficient, he lacked faith. He was a sincere and devout but still a self-righteous worshipper. And let us learn from this, that wickedness of heart does not always shew itself in refusal to worship God. Neither does it prove that we are accepted in our worship, because we draw nigh with sincerity and devotion; for unless we add faith, the Lord will not accept us. We have already learned what faith is; and by carefully examining this historical illustration of it, we may, by God's help, apprehend its nature more fully.

Both faith and unbelief imply previous instruction; a man can neither believe nor disbelieve a testimony of which he

¹ I John iii. 12. ² Genesis iv. 5.

has never heard. The statement of the text concerning these two sons of Adam, implies that both of them had been instructed in the way of approach to God; but whilst the one reverently believed what he was taught, the other presumptuously rejected it. Their mother Eve was doubtless the instructor of their childhood; and their father Adam, of their maturer years. Our first parents indeed did not know Divine truth as we know it; but still enough was revealed to save the soul that believed it. Their own experience told them that they had been, at the first, created upright, and that before sin had come between them and their Creator, they had free access into his sacred presence. They knew from God's own mouth, that by their fatal trespass they had brought down his wrath at once on themselves and on their posterity; and they must have known that both they and their children were adding to that wrath by the transgressions of every hour. The depravity of heart which the fall had entailed, must have been with them a matter of consciousness; and it could not possibly escape their observation that this depravity was communicated to their offspring; that their children were in their own likeness, and after their own image.¹ But though thus conscious of their fall from God, and eye-witnesses daily of the results of that terrible catastrophe, they were not without hope; God had said that the Seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent. He had also intimated, however darkly, that this bruising should be effected through an expiation for human guilt, and man's consequent forgiveness and reconciliation to Himself. For he had put aside the fig-leaves which they had sewed together to cover their nakedness, and making coats of skins, he had clothed them with his own hand.² These coats of skins must have been furnished by animals slain in sacrifice; for animals, at that early period, were not used for food. It is equally evident that these sacrifices must have been of God's appointment; and as he directed them to slay the animal, and to clothe themselves with its skin, he would surely instruct them in

¹ Genesis v. 3.² Genesis iii. 15, 21.

the meaning of these symbolical acts. The sacrifice and clothing together would thus be to their faith the most beautiful foreshewing of Christ the expiation for iniquity, and the bringer in of that everlasting righteousness in which the guilty were to find acceptance with God. They saw these things indeed "as through a glass, darkly." But still they knew enough to encourage them, to look up to God as they laid their sacrifices on His altar, confiding in his pardoning mercy, and expecting his gracious acceptance of themselves and of what they brought. Now all this knowledge of themselves, of God, and of the way of approach to him, whether derived from personal experience or the result of Divine teaching, would doubtless be communicated by our first parents to Cain their first-born and to Abel his brother. But Cain rejected what they taught him, whilst Abel reverently received it. I do not see, Cain replied, why I should be cursed on account of my father's sin; neither do I see that any sins of my own deserve so dreadful a recompense. My father tells me too that my heart is very wicked, but I am not conscious of this wickedness. Far be it from me to be regardless of God or of his worship. He is very good; I owe to his goodness life and all its comforts, and it is through his blessing that my land brings forth its increase. He deserves therefore to be acknowledged as a gracious and bountiful Creator, and I will acknowledge him as such, with all devotion and sincerity: but as to confessing myself a miserable sinner and putting my trust in the blood of atonement, I do not understand what these things mean. We may well put this language into Cain's mouth; it was the language of his behaviour. He "brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the Lord," an offering which acknowledged indeed a Creator's kindness, but implied neither confession of his own sinfulness, nor recognition of a Redeemer's love. Blessed be God, was on the other hand the language of Abel, that he has provided a Saviour to redeem us from our father's guilt and from our own! Blessed be God that unclean and depraved as I am, I have access to him through that Saviour! I will go then into his

presence and take in my hand a sacrifice. It shall be a token of my faith in the Lamb which he shall yet provide, and that I, as a creature accursed by transgression, look for acceptance through that provision of his mercy ; it shall be my cheerful acknowledgement that, in return for his redeeming love, I consecrate myself, with the best that I have, to his service and glory. And acting upon this godly purpose, Abel "took of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof." If we had only the book of Genesis to guide us, we might not have been able thus to interpret his act ; but the statement of the text, that he presented his sacrifice in faith, makes its meaning abundantly plain. And in this act of Abel accordingly, we discern faith to be what St. Paul has defined it, viz. "the substance of things hoped for," and "the evidence of things not seen." The word of God was then the only evidence that he would, in the fulness of time, provide a Lamb for a burnt-offering ; and ages were to roll over the world, before this purpose was to find its accomplishment. The propitiation of Christ moreover, which we now look back upon as finished and perfected, was in the days of Abel, among the things hoped for. And God seems to have instituted sacrifice to give a substantial character to this hope. For the presence of the victim before the bodily eyes of the believing offerer, enabled him to keep the great propitiation which it typified, steadily before the eye of faith. In this temper of mind then, these two brothers drew near to God. The book of Genesis simply intimates the Divine judgment on them and on their offerings, but the text, as we have seen, lifts the veil, and discovers the reason of that judgment. With all his sincerity and devotion, self-righteous Cain was rejected ; whilst believing Abel, through self-renunciation, found the grace which he was seeking. We need not inquire further ; it could not possibly be otherwise. As God will not suffer himself to be mocked by those who presume to come to him in ways of their own ; so neither can He mock any who come to him in unfeigned reliance on the mercy which he has revealed.

II. The text declares that God manifested on the spot, his judgment of these two brothers; it declares also the manner in which this was done. Abel "obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts." We have frequent examples in Old-Testament Scripture, of the way in which this was done. The fire of God fell and consumed the sacrifice. We read that on the day of Aaron's consecration, when he and Moses his brother came down from offering the sacrifices appointed for that solemnity, "there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt-offering and the fat."¹ And we are told that on the day of the consecration of the temple, "when Solomon had made an end of praying, the fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices."² It is also specially noticed that on both occasions, as if to declare the meaning of this act, "the glory of the Lord appeared." There is another example of the same thing in Old-Testament history; and perhaps it is more striking than either of the cases now referred to. Elijah sought to recover apostate Israel from their idolatry; and a solemn assembly was, by Ahab's command, convened on Mount Carmel. The prophets of Baal, as had been agreed on, prepared their altars, presented their offerings, and besought their god to intimate his acceptance of them. But they besought in vain; there was none to answer them. God's solitary prophet prepared his altar in the next place; and having presented his offering, called on the name of the Lord. And the answer was immediate; "the fire of the Lord fell, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench."³ Such was God's method on all solemn occasions, of testifying his acceptance of the gifts presented to him. And the Hebrews to whom this was well known, would naturally suppose St. Paul to mean, from the language employed in the text, that it was so in the case of Abel. We have every reason to suppose the same; and it throws very great light on the history of the transaction, as recorded in the book of Genesis.

¹ Leviticus ix. 24.² II Chronicles vii. 1.³ I Kings xviii. 38.

The two brothers, as I conceive, having prepared their altars and presented their offerings, knelt, in reverence before the Lord; and after solemn silence for a space, his fire fell from heaven, and consumed the offering of the younger, leaving that of the elder untouched. Abel, rising from prayer, would return to his home, filled doubtless with joy and thankfulness: and with respect to his brother, we can well understand the statement that "Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell." The case of Abel then, besides being an example of the nature of faith, is an example also of its recompense, verifying the apostolic statement that the Divine approbation is obtained by it. For it scarcely requires to be pointed out that to obtain witness that we are righteous, and to obtain a good report, are one and the same thing.

Righteousness alone can obtain the approbation of God. And we are instructed from the text in the nature of righteousness, and how it can be found in a fallen creature. Abel, we are told, believed in the great propitiation, and obtained by doing so, witness that he was righteous. We speak of *self-righteousness*, but in very truth there is no such thing. For the man who is not relying unfeignedly on the sacrifice and work of Christ, has in the sight of God, no righteousness at all. Uprightness, benevolence, and other good moral qualities may be found in his character, but he lacks the first element of righteousness; for its first element is faith in Jesus. Let us not however misunderstand this; let us not suppose for a moment, that our faith is our righteousness, i. e. that it possesses some merit in the eyes of God. The very idea of such a thing, the ascription for an instant of any merit to faith, is the most singular of all proofs of man's tendency to self-dependence. For the essence of faith is self-renunciation; we acknowledge in believing, that we have no claim on God for any thing but wrath, and that for our pardon now and hope of glory hereafter, we are entirely indebted to his sovereign mercy. Would we then be righteous, this is the way of righteousness. Let us depart from this narrow way to the right hand or to the left; let us make our good works on the one

hand, or our faith on the other, (for it matters not,) our ground of confidence toward God; and in doing so we depart from righteousness.

III. And of all the precious truths which we have now been considering, Abel, "being dead, yet speaketh." Abel is dead: Cain slew him ere he had lived half his days. And perhaps the enemy who stirred up Cain to slay him, thought when he saw him dead, that the influence of his pious example would be felt no more. But God, in this as in every instance, has made the malice of that enemy to defeat itself; for he has caused the history of his righteous servant's martyrdom to be recorded in his inspired word. And thus, though the tomb so early closed on him, his voice has been heard issuing from it through all past ages; yea it issues from it still, and will do so until the end of time. He was God's first martyr, sealing with his blood the blessed truth of salvation through the sacrifice of Christ, and acceptance with God through faith in his precious name. On these things he spake to the Hebrews; on these things, I repeat, he still speaks to us. Let us consider this particularly.

The Hebrews were then persecuted by their unbelieving countrymen, for their faith in a crucified Redeemer; and they were themselves, through the force of Jewish prejudices, strongly tempted to forsake that faith. But Abel speaks to you from the tomb, says the Apostle, and bids you adhere to it. It was his own faith. His offering was more excellent than that of Cain, because he believed in the Lamb of God, yet to be slain for sinners. And "by it," i. e. by that offering and its acceptance, he points out to you the way of acceptance and salvation. Your countrymen persecute you for this faith, because it offends their self-righteousness. They "have a zeal of God" indeed, they are not deficient either in sincerity or in devotion; but it is "not according to knowledge," for they are "ignorant of God's righteousness," and go about "to establish their own."¹ Cain hated and persecuted Abel for the very same cause. He thought

¹ Romans x. 2, 3.

his heart and life so good, that they did not need the washing of atoning blood; but he soon gave awful proof of the passions which raged within, for he became a foul murderer. And so it is, alas, with our countrymen. They imagine that they are righteous, and yet they have "both killed the Lord Jesus and their own prophets,"¹ and are now persecuting you with murderous violence. But Abel bids you not regard their violence. He says to you from the tomb, I was sent hither indeed before my time by the bloody hand of a wretched brother, but my sacrifice was accepted, and I have entered into rest, waiting in the bosom of God for the day of the resurrection of the just. Follow his example, St. Paul would say, and yield yourselves to be slain by your self-righteous brethren, if such be the will of God. For if ye be slain with Abel, for the name of Christ, oh then, happy are ye!

And though we are not persecuted like the Hebrews, Abel has the same word for us. Our natural ideas of religion are utterly astray. We know that we are the creatures of God, and that he is entitled to our services; but we have no idea that our obedience must begin by suing for and obtaining deliverance from his wrath. We believe him to be a merciful Creator who is not extreme to mark our frailties, failings, and shortcomings; who graciously accepts our sincere endeavours to please him; and when we do seriously amiss, sets the good which we have done against the evil, and overlooks the one for the sake of the other. And as long therefore as our consciences do not charge us with any very flagrant breach of his commandments, we trust that we are accepted with him, and on the way to a happy immortality. Now on this it is enough to say that it is, in all respects, THE RELIGION OF CAIN. Let no one startle at the expression, or ask in astonishment, how I can speak of a murderer's religion! For I speak of Cain as he was on the memorable morning to which the text refers, and he was no murderer then; yea as far as we know, he was unstained with any vice. Had it been otherwise, had Cain

¹ I Thessalonians ii. 15.

been then a reckless profligate, we should not have read of his preparing his altar, and presenting his offering to the Lord. I have already explained that he was at that period a sincere but a self-righteous man. He acknowledged God as a Creator, and professed gratitude for his benefits and willingness to be his servant; but the acknowledgment went no farther, he disowned him as a Redeemer. And hence, alas, the rest of his mournful history. Meeting no acceptance in his worship at the hand of him who smiled so graciously on his believing brother, he became maddened with rage and jealousy; and having first stained his hand with that brother's blood, hid his dishonoured head and ended his dishonoured days in the land of Nod, i. e. of the vagabond, an outcast from the presence of the Lord.¹ Let every self-righteous professor then, every one whose views of religion are those described above, read this history and tremble. Let him read in it the real character of that heart which he imagines to be so good, and the real value of that religion in which he boasts. It needs only that his pride be offended by a discovery of the Divine purity and of his own depraved and lost condition, to make the whole unrenowned nature within him, rise like that of Cain, in rebellion against the Majesty of heaven.

How very different from these our natural ideas of religion, are the revelations of the holy gospel! It begins by telling us that the hold which we originally had of God, i. e. our claim as his creatures on his love and mercy and pity, is now lost; that the cord which bound us to him originally, has been snapped asunder by our sin; that we are now, by nature and by practice, outcasts from his favour. We are so by nature; the human family is attainted in its great ancestor's rebellion; "by the offence of one," says St. Paul, "judgment came upon all men to condemnation."² Death, that dreadful visitation from which none of us can flee, is from generation to generation, the sign of this attainer; it was "by one man," the same Apostle teaches us, that "sin entered into the world and death by sin;" "and so," he goes

¹ Genesis iv. 3-16.² Romans v. 18.

on to reason, "death passed upon all men, in whom all have sinned."¹ And we are so by practice, for we have added to this original offence our own actual transgressions. There is indeed a great difference between man and man in the number and magnitude of their offences; but we are expressly told by St. Paul that in one respect "there is no difference," that "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."² As the sinful children therefore of a sinful father we lie under a twofold condemnation, and our ruin is complete. As far as our own efforts to help ourselves can avail, our condition is past redemption, yea, it is past hope.

If the revelations of the gospel had stopped here, it had been better for us never to have heard them. Ignorance would in such a case, have been happiness; it would have been "folly to be wise." But they do not stop here: they go on to tell us of the merciful remembrance of the Lord. Jesus came down from heaven to say that "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son."³ The Holy Ghost has told us by St. John, that this only-begotten Son of God, was given as a propitiation "for the sins of the whole world;"⁴ and again, by St. Peter, that he "bare our sins in his own body on the tree."⁵ Human guilt, original and actual, has thus been expiated; and our blessed Redeemer, having reversed the sentence of man's attainder, has opened for him once more, a way into the bosom of God. This is the present condition of things between God and us. We are called moreover, to humble ourselves and to treat with him on these terms; to acknowledge that we are creatures ruined by transgression, and to trust unfeignedly in our Redeemer's blood, and in his mercy revealed therein. And that God who calls on us to do so, adds to his gracious command a solemn promise of acceptance; he declares that if we come to him in this way which his love has opened, we shall not perish; he assures us of forgiveness and eternal life. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ," was the word of St. Paul to the gaoler, "and THOU SHALT BE SAVED."⁶

¹ Romans v. 12. Original, Wicliff and Rheims.

² Romans iii. 22, 23.

³ John iii. 16.

⁴ I John ii. 2.

⁵ I Peter ii. 24.

⁶ Acts xvi. 31.

What I have now been explaining is the doctrine of justification by faith, the truth which is expressed in our eleventh article, and which the great Luther deemed so important that he pronounced it "the article of a standing or falling Church." There are only two ways in which the great blessing of justification can be obtained at the hand of God, by works or by faith. He who would obtain it by works, must come up to the righteousness of God's law, and fulfil all its requirements; and he may then lay claim to acceptance, in terms of the Divine promise. An angel of glory may obtain acceptance in this way; but it is a contradiction in terms to speak of a fallen creature doing so. For the justification of the fallen implies the forgiveness of their sins, as well as the acceptance of their persons; and the man who attempts to recommend himself to God by his works, denies by the very attempt, that he has any sins to be forgiven. This way to God's favour then being closed against us by the very fact of our having sinned, there is only one other way open, reliance on free grace. And this, I repeat, is justification by faith; a justification which is obtained, not by doing anything, but by believing in something which God has done. For we must not mingle these two methods of salvation; we must not attempt to do something for ourselves, and think to trust in Christ for what remains. St. Paul's language is express; "If by grace, then it is no more of works, otherwise grace is no more grace. But if of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work." And he tells us yet more distinctly that "to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt; but" that "to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."¹ In these words, let us observe, he that worketh and he that believeth are intentionally and expressly contrasted. The former is said by the Apostle, to obtain his reward as a matter of debt. If then there be such a man, if there be any who can say, my obedience is faultless and deserves the Divine recompense, let that man stand forth.

¹ Romans iv. 4, 5. xi. 6.

But if the whole earth does not furnish such a man, there is only one other way, says the Apostle, of obtaining Divine acceptance; and that is by working not, but by believing. He does not say that it is not obtained by working; he says that it is obtained by *working not*. Nothing in language can be stronger than this expression, especially as taken with its context. It signifies that we must designedly abstain from even attempting to do anything to procure salvation for ourselves, and must trust absolutely and implicitly in the free mercy of God. It is free indeed; the object of the faith of which St. Paul is here speaking, the God who is to be believed in, is he who justifieth *the ungodly*. Believing in him in this gracious character, and coming to him with unfeigned acknowledgment of our ungodliness, we obtain, as has been stated before, the forgiveness of sin and acceptance in his sight. St. Paul declares this in the scripture to which we are now referring. Having said that our faith is in this case, "counted for righteousness," he goes on to describe the blessedness bestowed on us to be that of iniquity forgiven, sin covered, and transgression imputed no more. It is in this way then that we are accepted before God; and it is when we are thus accepted, that instead of working not, we begin to serve him in sincerity and truth. Our works and services begin also then to find acceptance; they are the works and services of those who are JUSTIFIED BY HIS GRACE. Now this, let me remark in conclusion, was THE RELIGION OF ABEL. And he warns us from the tomb, to make it our religion. For self-righteous Cain slew him because he made Christ his hope, and because God testified from heaven that he accepted him in doing so. And the same God who accepted him, will accept us also; he "obtained witness that he was righteous;" and our faith, as we have just seen, shall be "counted for righteousness." There is moreover something very remarkable in the way in which his acceptance is recorded. "The Lord had respect to Abel, and to his offering." He had respect to Abel in the first place, because he came in faith; he had respect to what he brought in the second place, because it was the offering of

an accepted man. And he will in like manner, as has just been stated, have respect to us when we come to him in the Lord Jesus, and then to our services for the sake of those who present them. Following Abel's example, we shall meet with Abel's recompense.

But Abel warns us also from the tomb, that his religion was disliked. And it is disliked still. Salvation by free grace, has been "the offence of the Cross," ever since the Cross was preached in the world.¹ This dislike too is universal. The openly immoral dislike it, because even they imagine that they have something to recommend them to God. The upright and moral dislike it, because it makes no account of their goodness. And the outwardly religious dislike it also, because it sets aside their piety. But if we have been taught by the blessed Spirit to know our undone condition, we shall cleave to it as our only hope of salvation; and the dislike of the whole world will not move us to the right hand or the left. And whatever the self-confident may think, the only religion which has any abiding hold on the heart of man, is that which thus begins at the foot of the Cross. Cain's religion was destroyed in a moment, yea it was turned into bitter hatred, by the unwelcome revelation of a holiness which rejected him. But the Divine holiness and all the Divine perfections are satisfied in the Cross of Christ, and are therefore not against us but for us, if we have made that Cross our confidence. And so increase of knowledge must lead to increase of love, till knowledge is perfected and faith is swallowed up in vision. Transformed then, by the grace of God, into the holy image of our Saviour, we shall see him who pitied us in our vileness and justified us in our ungodliness: washed from every stain, and clothed with the raiment of righteousness, we shall see the face of that loving Father who received us in our misery and destitution. And at the rapturous sight love shall be perfected for ever. May God grant this grace to us all!

¹ Galatians v. 11.

LECTURE VII.

Hebrews xi. 5, 6.

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God. But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him."

THE verses which we have just read contain St. Paul's second historical example of faith, its results and its reward. The Hebrews were too well-acquainted with their own Scriptures not to be familiar with the name of Enoch. And they did not require to be told that this distinguished worthy of old time had obtained the Divine approbation; the testimony which God himself had borne to his servant in his translation without seeing death, rendered him independent even of apostolic witness. St. Paul however, as in the case of Abel, states something concerning Enoch which is not to be found in Old-Testament Scripture, viz. that the life by which he pleased God, and which was rewarded by his escaping death, was the result of faith. He then proves this statement by reminding the Hebrews that "without faith it is impossible to please him;" a proposition nearly self-evident; for as the Apostle goes on to reason, there is no pleasing God without coming to him, and no coming to God without believing "that he is," and that "he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." Taking the latter verse of the text then as St. Paul's account of

faith in general, and of the faith of Enoch in particular, let us consider his remarkable history in the light which it affords. And when we have been thus furnished with another proof at once of the real nature of faith, and of the results and glorious reward to which it leads, let us seek to bring home to our consciences and hearts, these solemn and all-important lessons.

I. Enoch believed that there was a God, that God might be sought, and that he was the rewarder of them that sought him. The seventh man from Adam, and his cotemporary for more than three hundred years, could not possibly be ignorant of the Divine existence. Nay more, he must have known something of the Divine character and of God's relation to mankind. He must have known that man was at the first created upright, and that transgression had been the cause of his miserable fall; he must also have known that by reason of that transgression God's wrath had descended on himself and his fellow-men. And the same common progenitor or those instructed by him, who taught Enoch to know these things, taught him, as we learn from the text, that God might be sought. We saw in the last lecture that Abel was aware of this truth, and that he approached God and was accepted. Enoch was aware of it also, and trusting in the sacrifice of that Saviour who was to be revealed in the fulness of time, he diligently sought God's face. And his faith which thus in one respect kept pace with that of Abel, went beyond it in another. Abel's faith embraced Christ's first coming; but Enoch's embraced his second coming also when the reward of his people shall be revealed. For he prophesied of that glorious event for the warning of the wicked and the consolation of the just; "BEHOLD, THE LORD COMETH" he said, "with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgment upon all."¹ The faith of Enoch thus embraced, in common with all true faith, the three fundamental principles of revealed religion, viz. the existence, the mercy, and the glorious promises of God. And it agrees, let us observe, with St. Paul's defini-

¹ Jude 14.

tion of faith. It was "the evidence of things not seen." It is needless to remark that, save the Divine testimony, Enoch had no evidence of these things; he had never seen God, and the revelation of the Saviour was then a far-distant event. It was also "the substance of things hoped for." Let us observe the terms of his prophecy, "behold the Lord cometh;" not will come. And this is not accidental, but the natural language of faith, which by laying substantial hold of the Divine promises and assuring itself of their fulfilment, turns in effect, the future into the present. It therefore takes no note of time, but overleaps intervening ages, esteeming a thousand years as one day. "Behold, the Judge" says St. James, "standeth before the door." "Let your moderation be known unto all men," says St. Paul, "the Lord is at hand."¹ "Behold, I come quickly" says Christ himself, "and my reward is with me."² Abraham saw this glorious revelation in his day, for faith imparted to God's promises the character of present reality. And Enoch seeing it also, proclaimed aloud to a thoughtless generation, "Behold, the Lord cometh."

The case of Enoch is an illustration too of the results and reward of faith. He "was translated," St. Paul tells us, "that he should not see death, and was not found because God had translated him." We are then informed of the reason of this distinguished honour and singular felicity. "Before his translation," says the Apostle, "he had" or rather has "this testimony that he pleased God;" i. e. it is recorded of him in holy Scripture that previous to his translation he had obtained the approbation of heaven. Now he obtained this approbation by his faith, and by the fruits which that faith brought forth in him. Let us turn to the book of Genesis, where God records his servant's history, and we shall see the truth of this remark. In the short compass of four sentences we are twice told that "Enoch walked with God." This beautiful language is most expressive. "Can two walk together," asks the prophet, "except they be agreed?"³ Moreover, when we walk with

¹ James v. 9. ² Philip iv. 5. ³ Revelation xxii. 12. ⁴ Amos iii. 3.

any one, we pursue the same path with them ; and our backs and faces also are toward the same objects. Thus then it was that Enoch walked with God. Believing in him as the God of mercy, and embracing his glorious promises, he was agreed with him and diligently sought his face. And loving him in whose mercy he thus confided, he loved what God loved, and hated what God hated ; he turned his back on sin and sinners, and his face toward righteousness and the righteous. Nor was it for a time only that Enoch followed this righteous course. There are many of whom God complains, as he did of Israel of old, "Your goodness is as a morning cloud, and as the early dew it goeth away."¹ But it was not so with Enoch ; he did not weary in the ways of God. He walked with him, as we read in the Scripture to which we are now referring, not a month nor a year, not ten years nor twenty years, not fifty years nor even an hundred years, but "THREE HUNDRED YEARS." He also during this period, as we read in the same Scripture, "begat sons and daughters;" so that his family were growing up around him, whilst he walked before them as the man of God. There is something very affecting in this thought. The youngest member of Enoch's family might have said, I remember my father for these fifty years, and he has still walked with God. My remembrance of him is the same, another member of his family might have answered, but it reaches back to an hundred years. Mine reaches back to two hundred, a third might have replied, but my earliest recollections agree with yours, for they recal only the man of righteousness and truth. And I remember our father for these three hundred years, his eldest son Methuselah might have said ; and as far as memory can retrace the events of our family-history during so long a period, I remember only the servant of the Most High. What a glorious result of faith is here ! The infidel says that it is of no consequence what a man believes. But we see the contrary in Enoch. His faith produced THREE HUNDRED YEARS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS ; it made him during that period, the loving

¹ Hosea vi 4.

father, the tender husband, the upright master, and the zealous servant of God. It must have done indeed in his heart, its blessed work of love, and made him superior by its joy-inspiring anticipations, at once to the smiles and to the frowns of the wicked world around him. And it did not go unrewarded. He "was translated that he should not see death," says St. Paul; he passed into the invisible world without tasting the bitterness of that last dreadful cup. "He was not," we read in the book of Genesis; he "was not found," says the Apostle. He disappeared from among men. His family and kinsfolk and acquaintance sought him, but could not find him. They knew not where he was gone, but we know: "God took him," says the book of Genesis; "God had translated him," says St. Paul. Elisha was present at the rapture of his master Elijah, and the disciples beheld when their Lord ascended to glory. And perhaps also in like manner, some of the just who then lived in the world, were the chosen witnesses of this great act of mercy. It seems more probable however, from the language employed, that it was not so; that God came secretly and stole away his faithful servant from a generation which knew not his worth. But however this was, the blessedness of Enoch was the same. He had believed in God as the rewarder of those that diligently seek him, and his own reward was earlier and more abundant than the most impassioned hope could have anticipated.¹

II. Let us now consider all this for our own profit. We have already seen what Enoch's faith was; he believed what God revealed, and expected what God promised. And faith in us must be the same. God has revealed to us, as he did to Enoch, the blessed truth of his existence; he has also declared that he may be sought, and that he is the rewarder of them that seek him. For he has made known in the Cross of Jesus, his love to the world and the taking away of the world's sin, and has promised acceptance and eternal glory to those who come to him in the risen Saviour. These gracious revelations are the objects of faith; and without

¹ Genesis v. 22—24.

such faith, "it is impossible," as the text warns us, that we should please God. For nothing else will bring us to God, will fill our hearts with his love, will dispose us to be his servants, or will render our services acceptable. If we are disposed to think otherwise, let us remember the history of Cain. He attempted to come to God without faith in revealed mercy; and if he was accepted, let us follow his steps. But he was rejected, as we saw in the last lecture; and his rejection is God's testimony to all generations that "without faith it is impossible to please him." And if we are without faith, we are without excuse in being so. For blessed indeed are the eyes which see the things which we see: Enoch's opportunities and advantages were as nothing compared to ours. Instead of the dim and indistinct intimations of gospel-grace which were vouchsafed in his day, we are privileged to dwell in the meridian light of the Cross, and to behold God's love and mercy written there as with a sunbeam, so that he who runs may read. The future reward of God's believing people is also plainly set before us. Enoch knew that the Redeemer should come in glory; but we know what this glory is. God has told us that Jesus is his Melchizedec, King and Priest; he has told us also that his people shall be coheirs with him, being made "kings and priests unto God and his Father."¹ In short, God has told us every thing which we need to know, in language intelligible to the understanding of a child. And there is no difficulty, no mystery about faith; we believe man when he speaks to us, and God is surely more deserving of our confidence. What shall be said then if, with all these advantages, we are found not to have known a Saviour's love, and not to have trusted in a Saviour's promises? Believing Enoch will rise against us and condemn us in the day of the Lord.

With faith, as we have already learnt, its results and reward are necessarily and most intimately connected. We learn from the case before us, that its results are righteousness now, and that its reward is glory hereafter. Let us take these topics in order.

¹ Revelation i. 6.

There is a very large class of persons to whom faith seems a very easy thing. They tell us that God's love, mercy, and promises are enrolled among the articles of their creed, that they have always devoutly believed them, and that in addressing them as unbelievers and calling them to the exercise of faith, we injure and insult them. But what, let us ask such persons, has this faith done for you? You say that you believe in God's love. Have you learned then to love him again, and are you daily seeking to serve him? You say that you believe in his promises, that you are looking for the glory prepared for his people. Does this hope lead you then to live above the world, and make your conversation even on earth, that of the citizens of heaven? Do not say that these questions are irrelevant, and that we have no right to try faith by such tests. If we had made the same inquiries of Enoch, he could have answered us: and though he is not in the world now, Scripture, as we have already seen, answers on his behalf. It tells us that his faith in God taught and enabled him, for three hundred years, to do his will. This was its result though the will of God was then but little known, and the way of serving him was very indistinctly revealed. It is very different with us. The will of God is revealed now as plainly as the promises of salvation; and if we desire to do it, we know where to apply for strength. Let us bring our faith then to this test. For if the faith of Enoch will at last condemn the unbelieving, his three hundred years of righteousness will condemn the unholy professor.

There is another class of persons to whom the case of Enoch speaks. They are not like the class just referred to, for they are really possessed of faith, and sincerely desire to serve and glorify God. But their views of Christian holiness are low, and their attainments are low in consequence. We expect, they say, to be justified by the righteousness of Christ, and through the free grace of God: do not speak to us therefore, of our ever being able so to walk as to obtain the Divine approbation; for we are only poor sinners, and our righteousness is as filthy rags. They think to do

honour, by such language, to the righteousness of the Saviour, and to magnify the grace of God. In this however they are mistaken. Far be it from us to lose sight for a moment, of the blessed truth to which our attention was called in the last lecture, viz. that we are justified by the grace of God through faith in the sacrifice of his Son. But we must be equally tenacious of the kindred truth that the justified man, though the sacrifice of Christ must continue to be his only confidence to the end, is made by the grace of God, really and truly righteous. For in justification, the Holy Ghost takes possession of the heart; and when that heart is sanctified and hallowed by his gracious indwelling, we are enabled so to order our life and conversation as to win the approbation of that Father in whose mercy we have placed our hope. It was thus with the Thessalonian believers. We remember "without ceasing," says St Paul, "your work of faith, and labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God, even our Father." Their work, their labour and their patience were precious in the eyes of the Apostle; but his chief joy in these fruits of righteousness arose from his remembering that another eye observed them, the paternal eye above. Many persons startle at this language, as if we meant by using it, that there was some goodness yet lingering in fallen man. St. Paul tells us, they say, that "there is none righteous, no, not one;" and again he says, "I know that in me dwelleth no good thing." But such texts as these have nothing to do with the matter. They speak of a man as a fallen and corrupt creature; St. Paul is careful to explain in the last cited text, that it is in his flesh that no good thing dwells: but we are now considering man as a creature redeemed, and dwelt in by the Spirit of his Redeemer. And if we would read God's account of him in this character, we must turn to another class of the texts. "He that saith, he abideth in him," says St. John, "ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." St. John had seen how Jesus walked; and, he of all men was aware of the import of

¹ I Thessalonians i. 3. Original.

² Romans iii. 10 vii. 18.

such a statement. He tells us again, that "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure;" that "whosoever abideth in him sinneth not;" that "he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous;" and that he that "is born of God doth not commit sin; for his seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin."¹ That very apostle, who speaking of himself as depraved in Adam, acknowledges, as we have just seen, that no good thing dwelt in him, and complains, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" tells us in another place, that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" had achieved for him the deliverance which he sought.² And in conformity with this, he tells those to whom his words were addressed, "I am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye are full of goodness:" he congratulates the Corinthians, "Ye abound in every thing, in faith, in utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and love:" he says of those who laboured with him in the gospel, "They are THE GLORY OF CHRIST."³ It is indeed impossible for fallen man, of himself, "so to walk as to please God." But Jesus died to make it possible for him to do so; and the Holy Ghost is given for the same blessed end. "He gave himself for us," says St. Paul, "that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify" us "unto himself."⁴ "Abide in me," is his own language, "and I in you...he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit." To this exhortation he has annexed the gracious promise, "Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." And we have an inspired comment on this promise, from one who heard it made,—"Whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight."⁵ Enoch, let us remember, is a living exemplification of this truth. If we learn from the case of Abel, that casting ourselves in our guilt, on God's free mercy, we shall be by him accepted and saved, we learn from that of Enoch, that by the renewing

¹ I John ii. 6. iii. 3, 6, 7, 9. ² Romans vii. 24, 25. viii. 2.

³ Romans xv. 14. II. Corinthians viii. 7, 23.

⁴ Titus ii. 14.

⁵ John xv. 4, 5, 7. I John iii. 22.

grace of God's holy Spirit, we may walk and live to his praise and honour. Let us not say then that we are poor sinners, and that much cannot be expected from us. Enoch also was a poor sinner; and his privileges and advantages, as has been already mentioned, were far, very far below those vouchsafed to us. And he who bent on Enoch his approving eye, reminds us of these superior privileges, and says to every one of us, as the lesson of his servant's history, Go, and do thou likewise.

And the God who rewarded Enoch will not leave us unrewarded if we follow his steps. If Abel being dead, yet speaketh, Enoch being translated, also speaketh. The one tells us that righteousness is hateful to fallen man; the other declares its value in the sight of the holy God. Man declared in the one case, that the righteous was not worthy to live; God declared in the other, that he was worthy to live for ever. Death was in the one case, the expression of man's hatred; exemption from death was in the other, the expression of God's love. And in connection with this last remark, let me observe that two very peculiar circumstances distinguished the reward of Enoch. He looked, as we have seen, for the glorious appearing of the Lord; and he passed to God without seeing death. And we see thus in him a foreshewing of the final reward of God's people,—of those who at the time of the end, shall be found walking with God and looking for Jesus; they shall pass into his presence without seeing death. For such a people shall be found on the earth in the day of Christ's glorious appearing; and Scripture tells us that this shall be their reward. "Behold, I shew you a mystery," says St. Paul; "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."¹ And he says even more distinctly in another place, that "we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (i.e. go before) them which are asleep. For the Lord himself," he adds, "shall

¹ I Corinthians xv. 51, 52.

descend from heaven with a shout....and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."¹ It is to this that Christ himself refers in his remarkable words in St. Luke's gospel. "I tell you, there shall be two men in one bed, the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left; two women shall be grinding together, the one shall be taken, and the other left." Let us observe this language,—“the one shall be taken,” as Enoch was taken, (“he was not, for God took him”); “the other,” being found unworthy, “shall be left.” The case of Enoch speaks therefore most emphatically to the Christian Church, and to us its baptized members. It bids us look for our Lord and follow Enoch's example, telling us that peradventure we may attain to his singular honour and felicity. Let us not answer that this is impossible, because the coming of Christ is as yet very far away. We cannot tell that it is far away. Christ has warned us that it shall come “as a snare, on all them that dwell on the earth,” and has charged us to “watch and pray always” that we may be counted worthy to stand before him.² He has said again, “Take ye heed, ye know not when the time is;” and again, “Watch ye therefore, for ye know not when the master of the house cometh...lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping.” And to prevent any from putting these solemn words away, as if they were applicable to the disciples alone, “What I say unto you,” he adds, “I say unto all, Watch.”³ These warnings and charges, applying therefore as they do to us, teach us that for ought we know, we may be the last generation of God's people on the earth, the generation in whose day the Son of Man shall be revealed from heaven. And the very possibility of such an event being so near, ought to stir us up to follow the example of Enoch's faithfulness, having Enoch's glorious recompense before our eyes continually.

I do not say that we are the last generation of the world, and neither do I say that we are not; God knoweth. If we

¹ I Thessalonians iv. 15—17.

² Luke xxi. 35, 36.

³ Mark xiii. 33—37.

are not, if it is God's will that we all should die, let us die in faith; and God will keep our dust and raise it up again at the last day. His raised and his translated saints, his Abels and his Enochs shall then have one reward and one glory; for those scriptures which have been already cited, tell us that "the dead shall be raised incorruptible," nay, that they "shall rise first." Let us remember however the feelings which were cherished on this subject by the believers of apostolic times. Surrounded by a wicked world, with which they had no sympathy nor communion, they earnestly desired, not to die, but that Christ would come and receive them to himself. "Our conversation is in heaven," says St. Paul; "from whence also we look for the Saviour...who shall change our vile body;" and "therefore, my brethren," he proceeds, "so stand fast in the Lord...the Lord is at hand."¹ "We know," he tells the Corinthians, "that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands." But dissolution of this earthly tabernacle, was not the object of his desire; for he proceeds—"We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."² Death shall be "swallowed up in victory,"³ in the resurrection of the righteous dead; and mortality, of life, in the translation of the living: and the latter of these glorious promises was the first object of desire among the Christians of apostolic times. They were even in danger, in this matter, of becoming impatient with God. "The Lord direct your hearts," says St. Paul to the Thessalonians, "into the patient waiting for Christ."⁴ But God enabled his people to exercise this patience; and so, when they saw that their Lord came not to them, they were content, nay they rejoiced to go to him, that they might abide in his bosom till the resurrection of the just. "I am in a strait betwixt two," St. Paul exclaims when contemplating his possible martyrdom, "having a desire to depart, and to be with

¹ Philippians iii. 20, 21. iv. 1, 5.

² II Corinthians v. 1—4.

³ I Corinthians xv. 54.

⁴ II Thessalonians iii. 5.

Christ, which is far better."¹ But these are not the feelings of God's people in the present day; we look now, (I speak generally,) for nothing else than death. Whereas, while we are content to die, we ought to be found looking and longing for the revelation of our Lord and Saviour, the abolisher of death and the bringer in of the everlasting kingdom. Such a hope would purify our hearts and deliver us from the power of a present evil world. The prospect of death is never spoken of as purifying; but we are told by St. John, that "when he shall appear, we shall be like him," and that "every man that hath THIS HOPE...purifieth himself, even as he is pure."² St. Peter also, having spoken of the coming of the day of God, and the revelation of the new heavens and earth, says, "Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found...without spot, and blameless."³ And St. Paul, when enlarging on Christian duty, reminds us that it is the grace of God which teaches us to live thus "soberly, righteously, and godly...looking for that blessed hope, even the appearing of the glory."⁴ So that, according to the testimony of these three apostles, it is the hope of being glorified with Christ which will teach us to follow the example of Enoch's righteousness and diligence, and stir us up to seek resemblance to HIM in whose presence we are longing to appear. And by producing these holy results, this hope will accomplish its object. For it is not to a worldly-minded and carnal people, but to a people thus walking and pleasing God, that Jesus shall at last be revealed. The holiness of his people therefore hastens his appearing; "What manner of persons" asks St. Peter, "ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting the coming of the day of God."⁵ Nor is it difficult to understand how this should be. Only two men since the fall of our first father, have been counted worthy to pass to God without seeing death, viz. Enoch and Elijah. The former was eminent for righteousness, in the midst of an abandoned generation; the latter, for godly zeal in the midst

¹ Philipplans i. 23.² I John iii. 2, 3.³ II Peter iii. 14.⁴ Titus ii. 11—13. Original.⁵ II Peter iii. 11. 12. Margin.

of a covenant-people apostate from the Lord. And God gave this testimony of his approbation of both, taking them to himself from those who despised and hated them. Now Scripture has expressly warned us that the world and the professing Church shall, in the time of the end, be in the same evil and in the same apostate condition. But God's people shall still witness for his name; for as "the wickedness of the wicked" increases, they shall walk in the midst of it as Enoch and Elijah did. And the objects on the one hand, of the world's contempt and hatred, and wearied out on the other, with its abounding profligacy, they shall send up to heaven the living cry, "Come, Lord Jesus." Nor shall that cry be unheeded. The Lord shall rend the heavens and come down in answer to it, manifesting his approbation of righteousness, by receiving his faithful ones, as he received Enoch, to himself, and destroying with the right arm of his vengeance, "them which destroy the earth."¹

Let us follow Enoch's example then, and be found looking for our Lord; let us tread in Enoch's steps, being found, like them that wait for such a hope, with our loins girded and our lamps burning. And let us not say that it is the same thing to us whether we go to Christ by death, or he comes to us in glory. This is the language of cruel selfishness. "Blessed" indeed "are the dead which die in the Lord;"² for they leave all their sorrows, cares, and temptations behind them. But though they enter into peace, Satan's power is not broken, and the world from which they have departed, is still groaning under the oppression of wretchedness, sin, and death. It shall be far otherwise when Jesus comes to his people. The day of their glory shall be the day of universal joy: it shall be the creature's deliverance "from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God."³ There is this blessed difference between the translation of Enoch and those of whom Enoch was the prototype. He left a world of sin and misery behind him, a world led astray of Satan. But when Jesus shall change his people into the likeness of his glory,

¹ Revelation xi. 18.² Revelation xiv. 13.³ Romans viii. 21.

the whole earth shall break forth into singing, for He shall "make all things new." "There shall be no more death, nor sorrow, neither shall there be any more pain. The tabernacle of God" shall also be "with men, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God."¹ As for Satan and his angels, they shall be cast into the bottomless pit, and their hateful works shall be made an end of for ever. The Lord in his own time, hasten that glorious day!

¹ Revelation xxi. 3-5.

LECTURE VIII.

Hebrews xi. 7.

"By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith."

WE cannot read these words, however superficially, without discerning at once the object of the inspired writer; they contain a third, and a most singularly apposite illustration of the subject in hand. Noah was warned of God of things not seen as yet, and acted upon the warning, preparing an ark. And he obtained by doing so, the testimony of God's approval, in the salvation of himself and his house. We are thus furnished with another proof of the justice of the definition of faith, and the correctness of the statement regarding it, with which this important chapter opens.

But the words which we have now read, contain besides this, most precious and invaluable instruction; for they teach us in a more striking manner than either of the preceding cases, that faith is an act, not of the understanding merely, but of the heart. We have the root of faith; Noah was "moved with fear," i. e. when God spake, he heard with reverence, and believed. We have the result of faith; obedience; he "prepared an ark." We have the effect of faith on others; "by which he condemned the world." And lastly, we have the testimony of God to him who thus believed his word; he "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." All this is most important. It has

long been a leading objection of the infidel to Christianity, that it makes so much of faith. You tell us, he says, that faith is believing a testimony. Now a man is quite passive in believing. If suitable evidence be afforded to him, he cannot help believing; if it be lacking, he cannot make himself believe. We are not therefore responsible for our belief, (as was once declared in public and high places,) any more than for the colour of our skin. And to annex the Divine approbation to faith, and to reward it with salvation on the one hand, while the unbeliever is visited on the other, with condemnation and wrath, are unrighteous acts, and utterly unworthy of God. But this vain reasoning is at once set aside, if the seat of faith be in the heart. And it has its seat there, if its root be reverence of God, and its unfailling result, obedience to his will. God is moreover glorified if this be so, in annexing salvation to faith, and visiting unbelief with condemnation. The unbeliever says, I lack evidence, and no blame attaches to me; God says, there is sufficient evidence, and "he that believeth not is condemned already."

Let us now consider this precious subject in detail; reviewing in the first place, the history of Noah, and the lessons which it teaches; and inquiring in the second place, into the application of these lessons, both to the Hebrews and to ourselves.

I. In reviewing the history of Noah, we shall follow the natural divisions of the text. I shall endeavour to shew, by comparing it with the book of Genesis, that Noah's faith was indeed "the evidence of things not seen." And while his faith was thus an act of the understanding, the same comparison will discover that the heart entered largely into it, by revealing his spirit of godly fear and implicit obedience, by explaining to us also how he condemned the world, and by shewing the Divine estimate of the character of his servant. Due consideration of these things will then enable us to understand the reward of Noah. For the Divine approbation always expresses itself in act, in time or in eternity. It expressed itself to Abel in the acceptance of his sacrifice;

to Enoch, in his translation to glory; and to Noah, in his salvation from the flood.

We are told in the book of Genesis, that "when men began to multiply on the face of the earth," the sons of Seth, led captive by their eyes, took to themselves wives of the ungodly daughters of Cain. The offspring of these unhallowed unions became a race infamous for crime, and universal corruption soon overspread the world. God saw this fearful apostacy; it repented him that he had created the human family, and he resolved to destroy them. He was pleased to communicate to one man these feelings and awful purposes; that man was NOAH. To him God said, "the end of all flesh is come before me....behold I will destroy them with the earth." It might be more than faith could grasp, that the merciful and gracious One could really entertain such a purpose. It was therefore announced again, with yet greater distinctness and precision. "Behold, I, EVEN I," said the Lord, "do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die." And as the execution of this awful sentence approached nearer, it was announced a third time. "Yet seven days," said the Lord, "and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy."¹ It is to these warnings of God to Noah, that St Paul refers in the text. They were warnings of "things not seen as yet," for there was no outward indication of the approach of this terrible catastrophe. The sky remained serene, the earth and ocean preserved their usual relative positions, and all things seemed to bid fair for continuance in the stable condition in which they had been originally fixed. We are assured that this was the case from the circumstance mentioned by our Lord, viz. that the men of Noah's generation were to the last, deaf to his warnings; nay, were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, till the very day of his entrance into the ark.² In this then, we see Noah's faith. There was no appearance of danger; but God said

¹ Genesis vi. 1—17, vii. 4

² Matthew xxiv. 38, 39.

that destruction was at hand, and Noah took God's word as his "evidence of things not seen."

The same word which was Noah's evidence of the coming catastrophe was reported by him, as we shall see immediately, to the men of his generation. They had thus the same evidence with himself. But none of them regarded it. They pointed to the serene sky, to the quiet ocean, to the stable earth, and laughed believing Noah to scorn. For they were guided by sense, whilst Noah followed faith. To what then is this difference to be attributed? The text answers us, Noah was "moved with fear." Let us remark this expression. It does not signify terror but godly reverence; that spirit which prompts us to say, "Speak, for thy servant heareth."¹ It was because the men of Noah's generation had no such spirit in them, that they despised the Divine warning; it was because Noah was possessed of it, that he gave instant heed to that warning. It was because God knew him to be possessed of it, that he was made a sharer in the Divine counsels, on this awfully momentous occasion. For just before we are told of these counsels being communicated to him, we read that "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord," that he "was a just man and perfect in his generations," and that he "walked with God."²

We have still further evidence however, that Noah's faith was an act of the heart. God commanded him to take steps for the preservation of himself and his house. "Make thee an ark," he said; "rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch;...with lower, second, and third stories shalt thou make it." God added moreover, "Thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee. Of fowls" also "after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive." And for himself and the vast animal family which was thus to be saved along with him, Noah was commanded finally to lay up store of all sorts of food; "Thou shalt gather it to thee," said the Lord,

¹ 1 Samuel iii. 10.

² Genesis vi. 8, 9.

"and it shall be for food for thee, and for them." Without cavil, without murmur, without objection "thus did Noah; according to all that God commanded him, so did he."¹ Some of us may be disposed to reply that it was a very easy trial of obedience. But such a remark is the offspring of mere thoughtlessness. We are told by St. Peter, that "the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a-preparing:" the same apostle tells us that Noah was "a preacher of righteousness."² We are told in the book of Genesis, that this long-suffering waited for "an hundred and twenty years;"³ and during that period therefore, Noah was at once preaching God's word and labouring with his hands at the work assigned to him. Month succeeded month, and year succeeded year, but the sound of the axe was still heard in the forests, and of the hammer on the timbers of the ark; for Noah had none to assist him but his sons and grandsons, and the rearing of so vast an edifice, especially if we consider his avocations as a minister, must have been a work both of labour and of time. And as human nature is the same from generation to generation, the inhabitants of the old world would no doubt flock in crowds to view the progress of this singular undertaking. As the vast edifice began to take form, they would gaze with astonishment on story rising above story, and would inspect with wonder its internal structure, with chambers fitted for the reception of men and animals. But as they gazed and wondered, the man of God persevered and the work was still proceeding. They saw him at last finish it, and pitch it within and without to protect it from the hostile element; and what must have impressed all this yet more with the character of reality, they saw him patiently and carefully store up in it all kinds of food. They learned moreover, from his unwearied preaching, the purpose of this labour of ages; they saw him gather the male and female of every living creature into the shelter thus carefully prepared. And we know the character of the old world too well, not to be assured that as they saw and heard these things, curiosity

¹ Genesis vi. 14—22. ² I Peter iii. 20. II Peter ii. 5. ³ Genesis vi. 3.

and wonder would soon give way to other feelings. Contempt of the old man's credulity, expressing itself in taunts and sneers, would be the first; and as his perseverance led them to fear that peradventure he had reason for what he did, this feeling would in its turn, be succeeded by bitter hatred. Nor would this hatred be slow to express itself in a generation so lawless, so abandoned, and so violent. Scripture has drawn a veil over Noah's sufferings, and they remain veiled till the resurrection of the just. But judging from what man has done in every age against God's faithful witnesses, we have every reason to believe that whether testifying with his mouth or labouring with his hands, Noah had to do so in the face of violence and bloody threatenings; threatenings which, but for the Divine protection, would have been accomplished in the destruction both of the preacher and of the work with which God had intrusted him. And from his being able therefore, during so long a period, to set his face "like a flint" and persevere, we learn that Noah's faith was no cold conviction of the understanding, but was indeed an act of the heart. He revered, he loved, he believed God; he entered into the righteousness of his awful purposes; and though surrounded on every side with contempt, scorn, and violence, he could say with St. Paul after him, "none of these things move me."

All this prepares us to understand how Noah "condemned the world." The text says that he condemned it by his faith and preparation of the ark. If God had favoured him with some evidence of the coming catastrophe which was withheld from his neighbours; if his faith had been in this way a mere assent to evidence, whilst their unbelief resulted from lack of that evidence, he could not have condemned the world. But it was quite otherwise. God revealed his purpose to Noah, and Noah believing God, proclaimed it on every side: God directed him to prepare a shelter, and Noah taking advantage of the gracious command, prepared the ark in the sight of all men. The intellects of his contemporaries were not inferior to his own; they had the same capacity with him of receiving evidence, and of acting on warnings

clearly and distinctly given. But hardness of heart made them slight that evidence, and prevented them from acting on these warnings. And Noah therefore, by his faith and obedience, manifested their ungodliness, and shewed them to be deserving of Divine condemnation and wrath.

And by the same faith and obedience which thus condemned the world, Noah, as we are further taught in the text, "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." This expression is singular, but as it stands in contrast with the words which we have just been considering, its meaning is very plain. The excellent sacrifice of Abel condemned unbelieving Cain on the one hand, and obtained on the other hand for the offerer, God's "witness that he was righteous." And the preparation of the ark in like manner, while it manifested the ungodliness of an unbelieving generation, declared Noah to be a man of faith in God, and to be possessed of that righteousness which is the fruit of faith. That great act of sustained obedience justified God's estimate of the character of his servant, "Thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation."¹ It justified him moreover, as we shall now see, in the reward which he bestowed on him.

The text reminds us that this reward was preservation from death. And if we turn to the book of Genesis we shall find that after Noah and his family had, by Divine direction, entered the ark and the Lord had shut them in, "the fountains of the great deep were broken up" at the command of Omnipotence, "and the windows of heaven were opened." "The flood" we are further told, "was forty days upon the earth;...and all the high hills, that were under the whole heaven, were covered:...and all flesh died that moved upon the earth...all in whose nostrils was the breath of life...and Noah only remained alive, and they that were with him in the ark."² And God was glorified both in this terrible destruction and gracious preservation. Those who were destroyed had slighted his warnings, and hardened their hearts that they should not believe his word; their

¹ Genesis vii. 1.² Genesis vii. 7-24.

unbelief had manifested their ungodliness. Noah on the other hand, had hearkened to his voice and put his humble trust in his promised deliverance: and according to his faith so it was to him; that deliverance came. It was indeed a most signal testimony of God's approbation of faith and of that righteousness which is the result of faith; for the same Divine sentence which pronounced Noah righteous, contained the gracious invitation, "Come thou and all thy house into the ark." He was not saved alone; his house, as the text reminds us, was comprehended with him; God preserving even ungodly Ham from destruction that he might testify his approval of his believing and obedient father. And God has given yet further testimony of his approval of his righteous servant. He has caused his history to be recorded in holy Scripture; and his name and memorial are engraved by this record, in the archives of the kingdom of God. That honoured name, and the deeds which have made it honourable, have thus come down to us; the proof on the one hand, of the truth of the apostolic statement that God's good report was, in old time, obtained by faith; and the testimony against the infidel on the other, that the faith which thus results in salvation, proceeds from a righteous heart.

II. St. Paul, in thus referring to the case of Noah, seems to have had the peculiar circumstances of the Hebrews in his eye. For they as well as Noah, had been warned of God, of coming desolations and impending wrath. Jesus had said concerning their holy city "the days shall come...that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, and shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee."¹ He had said concerning their temple, that one stone in its sacred walls should not be left standing on another: he had spoken of tribulation coming on the Jewish people, such as had not been since the beginning of the world, nor should be till the end of it.² These things were "not seen as yet;" though as we learn from another part of this epistle, those

¹ Luke xix. 43, 44.

² Matthew xxiv. 1, 2, 21.

who were standing in God's counsel, could discern intimations of their approach.¹ But the unbelieving Hebrews blinded by pride and self-righteousness, were utterly deaf to all warning, and persecuted their believing brethren for having made Jesus, the ark prepared of God, their refuge against the day of calamity. St. Paul therefore in the text, would comfort those who were exposed to this persecuting violence, by reminding them of the circumstances, the faith, and the reward of Noah. Whilst our poor blinded brethren, he would say, scoff at the Divine warnings, and blaspheme Jesus the only ark of safety, let us, with Noah, "moved with fear," take refuge in the bosom of his love before the tempest of his wrath arise. And if they persecute us for doing so, let us possess our souls in patience; their violence shall soon be ended. For yet a little while, and that faith and patience having had its perfect work, shall glorify God in his judgments on their ungodliness: broken, dispersed, and trodden down of the Gentile, they shall afflict his heritage no more. But as for us whom they trouble, we shall be saved in the day of calamity; from under the covert of the Saviour's sheltering arms we shall behold with our eyes "and see the reward of the wicked."²

Besides this reference to the condition and prospects of the believing Hebrews, the text has a catholic application. Holy Scripture warns us that this present dispensation of grace shall issue in fearful judgment; warns us that there shall be a second flood, not of water but of fire. "The world that then was," says St. Peter, speaking of the earth in the days of Noah, "being overflowed with water, perished." And he then proceeds to tell us that "the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment." "The day of the Lord will come," he again declares, "wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat."³ We saw in the last lecture, that at the coming of that day the righteous shall be found in two conditions, some alive on the earth and others sleeping

¹ Hebrews x. 25.² Psalm xci. 8.³ II Peter iii. 6—12.

in the tomb. In both these conditions shall the wicked also be found. But how vast shall be the difference between the portions awarded to each! The living righteous, as we saw in the last lecture, shall be changed into the likeness of Christ's glory, and his dead saints shall be raised from their graves, incorruptible. The terrible fire which precedes him, shall on the other hand, burn up his living enemies;¹ and the wicked dead of all generations, shall be raised by his Divine power, to receive their final doom. Both these things are declared by Christ himself. "As it was in the days of Noah," are his words, "so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all... Even thus shall it be when the Son of man is revealed."² He has told us also that "the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."³ There shall therefore be no possibility of absence from this great assize, no possibility for sinners of any generation to escape sin's just reward. Are they alive on the earth when the Judge appears? No created arm shall shelter them. Are they sleeping in the dust? The obedient tomb shall yield up its charge at the irresistible command of the Omnipotent. Now in reference to all this, we are exactly in the position of Noah, we are "warned of God of things not seen as yet." And the faith therefore which was in Noah, will lead us to take the Divine word as our evidence of them, and stand in awe.

How is it then, in this respect, between God and the world? are the majority of those who have heard these warnings, giving heed to them or not? Alas, they are not. A few are found to give heed, but the mass give proof every day, by their ungodliness and thorough worldliness, that they have no faith in them whatever. And we have already referred to our Lord's assurance that this shall be the

¹ Psalm xcvii. 3.² Luke xvii. 26—30.³ John v. 28, 29.

character of the world till the very last, that men shall be eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, buying and selling, planting and building, till the rending of the clouds asunder shall reveal the glory of the Judge.

"Along the busy mart and crowded street,
The buyer and the seller still shall meet,
And marriage-feasts begin their jocund strain;
Still, to the pouring out the cup of woe,
When earth, a drunkard, reeling to and fro,
And mountains molten by his burning feet,
And heaven his presence own, all red with furnace-heat."

To what then is this difference between man and man to be ascribed? why is it that of those who meet together in the daily intercourse of life, and profess to worship God within the same hallowed walls, some are found believing him, whilst others are regardless of his word? We have already had our answer from the case of Noah. It is not that God has vouchsafed to some an evidence of his coming wrath which he has withheld from others: it is that some are "moved with fear" whilst others are ungodly. The pride of man rebels against this statement: sufficient evidence, human reason says, will always command faith. But reverence of God in the heart is necessary before his word appears to us TO BE SUFFICIENT EVIDENCE OF ANY THING; and from lack of this reverence man's unbelief springs. Scripture testifies most expressly to the truth of this; and "let God be true, but every man a liar."¹ Let us turn to the Old Testament. Why was it that king Josiah gave heed to the words of God's law, and trembled at those threatenings which the kings that were before him had despised? We have our answer from God's own mouth,—“Because thine heart was tender.”² Again, why did Belshazzar king of Babylon praise the gods of gold and silver, while his father Nebuchadnezzar, whose experience was perfectly known to him, had seen cause to acknowledge and fear the God of Israel? The words of the inspired prophet, “Thou hast not humbled thine heart,”³ at once declare the reason. To

¹ Romans iii. 4.

² II Kings xxii. 19.

³ Daniel v. 22.

come next to the New Testament; Christ tells us, in the parable of the sower, of four classes of persons who hear the word of God; but one class alone retain it. And he declares the cause of this difference, that class alone have "an honest and good heart."¹ Let us see moreover, to what bitter root St. Peter attributes the unbelief of men in those very warnings of which we are now speaking. "There shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming?" He charges these men with wilful ignorance of the judgment of God by the flood, and warns those to whom he was writing, to take heed lest they should be "led away with the error of the wicked," and fall from their "own steadfastness."² These Scriptures confirm the lesson which we are taught by the case of Noah, teaching us plainly that the seat of faith is in the heart. A bad heart, and it alone, leads us to disbelieve God; a heart like that of Noah, will make us listen to his warning voice.

Noah, as we have already seen, proved that his faith was genuine by preparing an ark to the saving of his house. And if we believe in the truth of the warnings which God has given to us, we shall give the same proof of our sincerity; we shall flee for refuge into the ark which he has prepared. We are in the circumstances of Noah when that place of safety was finished. God said to him then, "Come thou, and all thy house, into the ark;" and the same God says to every one of us now, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved."³ No other refuge shall avail in the fearful day which is hastening on. "If his wrath be kindled, yea, but a little, blessed are all they that put their trust in him."⁴ The bosom of his love is the only shelter from the arm of his power: within that bosom there is life and salvation; out of it there is death and ruin. Let us flee then to that bosom now, that we may find salvation. "Wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord,"⁵ is the word of Ananias to Saul the bloody persecutor: "whosoever

¹ Luke viii. 11—15.² II Peter iii. 3—5, 17.³ Acts xvi. 31.⁴ Psalm ii. 12. P. B. V.⁵ Acts xxii. 14.

shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved,"¹ is the assurance of St. Peter to those who had crucified the Saviour. Is salvation then so easily obtained? Nothing is so easy, if the heart be right. Noah was compelled to labour for ages, before his ark was ready. But God has prepared our ark; we have only to enter in.

And if then we do not enter in, if notwithstanding the warnings which God has given, that awful day of which mention has been made, shall take us at last unprepared, the text warns us what the result shall be. Our kinsmen, friends, and neighbours, who have put their trust in Christ, shall be a witness against us, to condemn us. Noah also, and the believing company of whom such honourable mention is here made by St. Paul, shall be a witness against us, to condemn us. Yea, every man who has believed God, from righteous Abel to the last saint who shall be gathered in, shall be a witness against us, to condemn us. Many too, who never were privileged to hear of Christ's sacred name, but who made good use of opportunities far inferior to ours, shall be a witness against us, to condemn us. The men of Nineveh shall testify before our face, that they believed God, and humbled themselves and "repented at the preaching of Jonas:" the queen of the south shall testify that "she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon."² And what then shall be said for us, if we are found not to have humbled ourselves before the Son of God, speaking from the bosom of the Father; if we are found to have despised the message of mercy and kindness which he brought to a ruined world from the depths of that bosom's love? Nothing shall be said for us: as the world was condemned by Noah, so shall we be condemned. God in that day, took witness in one of themselves, against men's unbelief and ungodliness, and then he drowned them. And so shall it be in the awful day that is coming. God shall take witness against those who have not believed him, in men of like passions with themselves; and then he shall destroy them. "For our God is a consuming fire."³

¹ Acts ii. 21.² Matthew xii. 41, 42.³ Hebrews xii. 29.

But if on the other hand, we now take refuge in him who is God's ark of safety, our final condition shall present a blessed contrast; we shall be owned as his righteous ones by the Lord when he comes in his glory. It was not written for Noah's sake alone, that he "became heir of righteousness;" for this righteousness is "by faith." God bore testimony to the righteousness of Noah, by saving him from destruction in the ark; and he shall bear testimony in like manner, to his believing people as his righteous ones, by saving them "in the Lord with an everlasting salvation."¹ Is Divine acceptance dear to us then? is eternal salvation precious? They are to be found in Christ. And let us not forget that in the case of Noah a further distinction than even personal deliverance was conferred on righteousness; his house was saved along with him. St. Paul moreover, as if this were in his mind, preached the gospel to the gaoler in these very terms, "Thou shalt be saved, and thy house." Let those among us who are heads of houses, who are husbands, fathers, masters, consider these blessed words. Let us invite them into the ark along with us; peradventure it may not be in vain. Let not prayer on our part be wanting, nor pious endeavours; and let these prayers and endeavours be inspired by faith, faith in the boundless and unsearchable goodness of God. Such prayers and pains shall have their recompense; we shall not enter heaven alone, our families shall attend us. Glorious recompense! Blessed reward! God grant that it may be the happiness of every head of a family among us! May every one committed to his charge yet say of him before the throne of the Eternal, "this was the unwearied and ardent suppliant for my happiness, this the beloved hand which thy grace taught to sue, and to receive for me the gift of salvation!"

¹ Isaiah xlv. 17.

LECTURE IX.

Hebrews xi. 8—10.

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

THESE verses contain another illustration of the nature and results of faith. The former illustrations have been taken from the world before the flood; but St. Paul now comes nearer to the Hebrews, referring to their own father Abraham, and after him, to the worthies of their own nation. And though the verses before us do not refer to it, the reward of faith is not forgotten. For the Apostle, as we shall see in the next lecture, having referred to the faith of Abraham's help-mate, mentions the glorious and abundant recompense which, in the Divine goodness, was bestowed on both of them.

Let me sketch in few words, the contents of the verses which we have read. They present to us the patriarch leaving his country and kindred, and sojourning in the land of promise. He thus left his country, they tell us, because he relied on the Divine assurance to guide him into a land which he should after receive for an inheritance: he thus sojourned in Canaan, because he believed God that Canaan was that land, and that it should be surely given to his seed. But it was a far better hope than that of the earthly Canaan,

which strengthened Abraham for such a life. The last verse of the text tells us distinctly what he looked for, even "a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." Such was his faith and such also were its results. Detailed consideration of both will prove the truth of the statements with which this important chapter opens, and will furnish us at the same time with instructive lessons for ourselves.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed, YEA he went out, not knowing whither he went.

I have given in this rendering, the intensity of the original. Abraham dwelt originally in Ur of the Chaldees. In that land his forefathers had dwelt; it was the land also of his kindred and of his father's house. He was an idolater among an idolatrous people. "Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time," said the Lord to Israel, "even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nahor: and they served other gods."¹ This circumstance explains the Divine procedure toward Abraham. The whole earth was, at that period, fast sinking into idolatry, and God determined to make one nation the depositary and preserver of the true religion. He selected a particular family as the nursery of that nation; he chose Abraham to be the head of that family. It was necessary that the father of the peculiar people, and the family which should proceed from him, should be separated from all contaminating influences; and God therefore said to Abraham, "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee."² He did not tell him where that land was, he told him simply that he would shew it; and commanded him, in the mean time, to leave all that was dear to him on earth. And the patriarch having confidence in the Divine faithfulness, "obeyed" the Divine word; "yea he went out," he set his face to the wide world, "not knowing

¹ Joshua xxiv. 2.

² Genesis xii. 1.

whither he went." In this we discern faith in its true character, as "the evidence of things not seen." Abraham saw his native land; its hills, its valleys, its streams had long been familiar to his eye. But he had never seen the land to which he was going, nor had he any evidence of its existence, except the word of the Lord. He was leaving a substantial certainty for what human reason would have called an uncertainty. But with Abraham it was no uncertainty, for he believed God. And God was faithful to his word. After his servant had left Chaldea in obedience to him, and had sojourned some time in Haran, he shewed to him and to his believing company that Canaan was the land reserved for them. "They went forth" therefore, "to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came."¹ And thus Abraham's first act of faith was rewarded; he found himself in the land of promise. But faith had still much to do: St. Paul proceeds,—

By faith he sojourned in the land of promise as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob the heirs with him of the same promise.

When the patriarch caught the first glimpse of the distant hills of Canaan, and much more, when he actually set foot in it, he perhaps imagined that all his trials were ended. He might suppose that nothing now remained for him but to take possession of Canaan in the name of the Lord; the faithful Promiser, he could not doubt, would in his own way enable him to do so. If these were his thoughts, his disappointment would be great indeed. He had come out of one trial of faith, and come out of it victorious; but it was only to be called to a greater. In the same sentence which mentions his arrival in Canaan, the inspired historian adds, "the Canaanite was then in the land."² Abraham found strangers in it before him, who shewed no disposition to quit possession or to acknowledge him as the rightful lord of the soil. Nor was this all. He who had made the promise,

¹ Genesis xii. 5.

² Genesis xii. 6.

now appeared to him and said, "Unto thy seed will I give this land."¹ These words and others of the same character which followed them, cut off completely all hope of possession during his life-time; and we are told expressly in another Scripture, that God "gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on."² But Abraham was content with the appointments and the words of the Lord. He dwelt cheerfully in Canaan as a stranger and a sojourner, pitching his tent to-day, removing it to-morrow, and having no home upon the earth. Nor did the prospect of dying in a strange land, and having his bones buried in a stranger's grave, make him regret for one moment that he had left Chaldea. And this pilgrim-life was not peculiar to Abraham; it was the lot of his son and grandson after him. They were "the heirs with him of the same promise;" and they were made like unto him in this also, that in their day that promise was to have no fulfilment. And it had none: these three patriarchs all died among strangers; and the cave in which their venerable dust was deposited, was obtained of the stranger for money.

The text tells us that they acted this part because they had faith in God. They believed his promise that Canaan should be given to their seed, and therefore they sojourned in it. A man without faith, placed in the circumstances of Abraham, would have said, Let God either give me the land or suffer me to go back to Chaldea. But Abraham did not so, he sojourned in it, "as in a strange country;" it is as yet a strange country, he said, but God's good time will come. It was also his delight, according to God's command, to walk through it in its length and breadth,³ to survey it, to take note of its beauty, to lift up his eyes on its green hills and fertile fields, as a man surveys with interest the property which is to belong to his heirs for ever. And what makes this example of faith much more striking, is the fact that during most of this time, though his hopes were centred in issue, Abraham had no child. But the same God who had promised an inheritance for the seed, had promised a

¹ Genesis xii. 7.² Acts vii. 5.³ Genesis xiii. 17.

seed for the inheritance. And the patriarch believing in the accomplishment of either word, "sojourned in the land of promise."

It is impossible not to remark that in all this we discern the genuine character of faith. Let us suppose for a moment that we had been privileged with the friendship of this sainted patriarch, and that we had attended him in some of these excursions through the land of Canaan. We mark the interest of his delighted eye, as it rests on pastures clothed with flocks and valleys covered over with corn; we hear him exclaim in rapture, with uplifted hands,—Behold the inheritance of my children! We inquire how he knows that it is their inheritance; and he answers that God has said it. We inquire again whether he sees any probability of the present inhabitants deferring to their rightful claim; and this simple believer answers, No, nor do I seek to see it. Were I to claim at this moment a single foot's breadth of it, the Canaanite would dispute my claim; but God, he would have repeated, has said that it is my children's inheritance, and I take his word as my evidence of things not seen.

St. Paul goes on to tell us on what the faith of Abraham terminated. He was content thus to leave his native land, and to abide as a sojourner in a land of strangers,

For he looked for THE city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

The change here of a single word gives much more force and intensity to the meaning of St. Paul. He is not speaking indefinitely but definitely. His reference, as we shall see more fully when we proceed with this chapter, is to the eternal habitation which God has prepared for his people; and an eminent translator has therefore rendered his words, "that firmly-founded city, whose builder and maker is God."¹ How very striking is the contrast which is thus presented to us! A tabernacle (or tent) pitched by the hands of man

¹ Boothroyd.

to-day, and removed by his hands to-morrow, was the earthly habitation of Abraham and his sons: a firmly-founded city, builded by the hands of God, and made to endure for ever, was the heavenly home to which these patriarchs looked. And it was this heavenly expectation which made them contented with their earthly lot. A delightful subject of meditation and inquiry now opens upon us, What was this heavenly expectation? Its importance demands our deepest and most earnest attention.

"They are not to be heard" is the orthodox declaration of our Church, "which feign that the old fathers did look only for transitory promises." God's promise to Abraham before he left Chaldea, was "I will bless thee...and thou shalt be a blessing:...in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."¹ And we are not left in uncertainty as to the patriarch's understanding of these words. "Your father Abraham" said our Lord to the Jews, "rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad."² Now the day of Christ is his manifestation as the Saviour. For this manifestation Abraham looked; and if, as was doubtless the case, he knew that Christ should spring from his family, he must also have known that it was as the father of Messiah, that he was to prove a blessing to all nations of the earth. But let us be more particular. The phrase Christ's day, when used in holy Scripture, may and often does signify his manifestation the first time in humbled flesh; but it refers much more frequently to his manifestation the second time, in Divine majesty and glory. Abel, as we have seen, looked for the former of these manifestations, and Enoch for the second; Abraham, I believe, looked for both, as the fulfilment of God's promise that in his seed all nations should be blessed. He had a visible type, as we shall see, of the death and resurrection of Christ, when he offered Isaac on the altar; and the words before us declare that he looked for his coming in glory. If we compare these words with the book of Revelation, this will be at once made plain to us. For that book speaks of God's firmly-founded city, and declares

¹ Genesis xii. 2, 3.

² John viii. 56.

that it shall be revealed in the day of Christ. "I was in the Spirit" says St. John, "on the Lord's day."¹ The common interpretation of these words, viz. I was in a spiritual frame on the first day of the week, is meagre and unsatisfactory. The Lord's day has no such meaning in any part of the New Testament; it signifies one thing only, the day of Christ's revelation. Nothing therefore can be more obvious than the meaning of the inspired Seer. I was rapt in the Spirit, he would say, caught away from the scenes and concerns of earth, and I found myself in the Lord's day, and amid its scenes of glory. He was permitted then to see many things of which we cannot now speak; but among them there was one which is much to our present purpose. "I John" he tells us, "saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven." And he is yet more particular, for he goes on to tell us, "There came unto me one of the seven angels...and carried me away in the Spirit ...and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God;...and had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates." Is not this the city of the text, "the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God?" It must be so, for we read again, "The wall of the city had twelve foundations...the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones."² In what a striking and beautiful manner does Scripture interpret itself! "Abraham rejoiced to see my day," says our Lord; "he looked" says the text, "for the city which hath foundations:" "I was in the Spirit in the Lord's day," says St. John, and saw "that great city coming down from God." This city is the glorious abode of the Redeemer and his redeemed people, and shall come down to the earth and rest upon it in the day of his second appearing. For when the hurricane of wrath of which we spoke in the last lecture shall have spent its fury and swept its wreck into the burning lake, the earth shall lift its head out of the fire, fair, smiling, and peaceful, "a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."³ It shall

¹ Revelation i. 10.² Revelation xxi. 2, 9.—13. 19.³ II Peter iii. 13.

"be filled with flocks of men," sevenfold its present population; they shall also "keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." Over this obedient world, Jesus and his saints shall sway, from the new Jerusalem, God's gracious sceptre of righteousness and love; and men being thus blessed in the Redeemer, "all nations shall call him blessed."¹ St. John tells us these things in the plainest manner. Along with the vision of the city he announces, "I saw a new earth...I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them...and he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new." He says in the same place concerning the saints, "I saw thrones, and they sat upon them...they lived and reigned with Christ:" he says concerning their glorious abode, the new Jerusalem, "The nations...shall walk in the light of it: the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it."² And when Jesus shall thus take the seat of empire and reveal the holy Jerusalem and make all things new, the assurance which God gave to the patriarch shall be accomplished, IN HIS SEED ALL FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED. "For the Lord of hosts shall bless" in that day, "saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance."³ These then were the gracious purposes on the accomplishment of which Abraham's heart was set, when he looked for the city of God. They had been communicated to him, as we have already seen, before he left Chaldea; and St. Paul in the text evidently means to tell us that they were the terminating object of his faith through the remainder of his pilgrim-life.

But what connection, it may be asked, was there in Abraham's mind, between these hopes and the land of Canaan? why might he not have cherished them, and still remained in Chaldea? This question suggests very weighty and important considerations; and the answer to it will teach us at once to admire God's wisdom in the past, and to

¹ Psalms lxxii. 17.

² Revelation xxi. 1, 3, 5. xx. 4. xxi. 24.

³ Isaiah xix. 25.

look with definiteness of expectation, for the fulfilment of his promises in the future. There was a twofold reason, I conceive, for God dealing with Abraham as he did. We must remember, first, as has been already remarked, that at the period of the patriarch's call, the whole earth was sinking into idolatry; and that if the purpose of God was to be accomplished in Messiah coming of human race, to destroy the works of the Devil, it was absolutely necessary that a holy family and people should be preserved in the midst of the nations. And if Abraham was to be the head of that family and the father of that people, there were obvious reasons against his remaining in Chaldea. He had been himself an idolater along with his kindred and father's house who still continued so; and all his associations were idolatrous. It might not have been possible for him in such circumstances, without a perpetual miracle, to have maintained in his native land the worship of the true God, and to have preserved it in his family. It seemed good therefore to Divine wisdom at once to cut the bond, and to separate Abraham from all injurious influence; sending him where he was not known, and taking him under his own immediate guidance. For the same reason, as I conceive, the patriarch, with his son and grandson after him, continued to dwell in tents and migrated from one place to another. For Canaan also was idolatrous, and but for this Divine direction they might have formed associations there. And let me remark, secondly that God had a peculiar reason for appointing Canaan as the scene of their pilgrim-life. It was the destined scene of the fulfilment of the promises in which they trusted; it was to be the theatre of Messiah's sufferings, and the theatre also of his glory. There seems no reason to doubt that these patriarchs were aware of this. Abraham was instructed, as we shall see more fully afterwards, in the Divine purpose to provide in that land an expiation for human guilt; and it is positively declared in the text, that he expected to see revealed in it the glory of Messiah. Let us observe the language made use of, "He went out...he sojourned in the land of promise....with Isaac and Jacob the heirs of the

same promise; for he looked for the city." These words shew plainly that there was a connection, in the mind of Abraham, between Canaan and the city of God, a connection which did not subsist between that city and Chaldea. If we had not other scriptures to guide us we should be greatly at a loss to understand this; but blessed be God, there is now no obscurity. We have already learned that CANAAN IS THAT LOCALITY OF THE NEW EARTH ON WHICH THE GLORIES OF THE KINGDOM SHALL BE ESPECIALLY DISPLAYED; that it is to be THE PLACE OF MESSIAH'S REST FOR EVER.¹ All the prophets testify to this purpose of God. "His feet," says Zechariah speaking of the Redeemer, "shall stand in that day upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem... and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee."² Gethsemane the scene of his lowest humiliation, which beheld him "sore amazed and very heavy" for his people's sakes; was at the foot of that memorable mount; and the same locality shall be illuminated with his and his people's glory, when he comes again as the crowned and sceptred King. We have also learnt, that when Abraham's spiritual seed shall thus reign with Jesus in Mount Zion, his natural seed shall be gathered again, and shall be God's holy and obedient people; the earthly Jerusalem also and the cities of Judah shall be rebuilt. Nothing can be more express on this point than the testimony of Jeremiah. "The days come" he tells us, "that it shall no more be said, the Lord liveth, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; but, The Lord liveth that brought" them "from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers."³ Again he tells us, "They shall yet use this speech in the land of Judah and in the cities thereof, The Lord bless thee, O habitation of justice, and mountain of holiness." And of Jerusalem he tells us, it "shall be built to the Lord, from the tower of Hananeel unto the gate of the corner...it shall not be plucked up, nor thrown down any more for ever."⁴

¹ Part II. Lecture VI. VII.

² Zechariah xiv. 3-5.

³ Jeremiah xvi. 14, 15.

⁴ Jeremiah xxxi. 23, 38-40.

We have learnt besides this, that when Israel shall have thus been gathered, and her cities builded again, her people shall be the spiritual fathers, guides, and teachers of all the earth. The days shall yet come, of which Isaiah and Micah and Zechariah have prophesied, when "the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains,...and all nations shall flow unto it;" when "the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem;" when "ten men of all languages of the nations shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew."¹ God's word to Abraham shall then indeed find its accomplishment; for in his seed, both spiritual and natural, all families of the earth shall be blessed.* That word shall then also be accomplished, which promised to him personally the inheritance of Canaan;² he shall abide with his Saviour in that very locality over which he once wandered as a stranger and sojourner, and be the delighted witness of the glories of which it shall then be the eternal scene. What was in his days the land of promise, shall then be the land of blessing: the "pure river of water of life, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb," shall water the earthly Jerusalem; and rivers of living water going forth from her, shall refresh all the nations of the earth. "Every thing shall live," says the prophet, "whither the river cometh," and on the bank "shall grow trees, whose leaf shall not fade;" their fruit also "shall be for meat," and their "leaf for medicine."⁴ And now then our question is answered; we understand what it was which bound Abraham to the land of Canaan. It was connected in the Divine purpose, and therefore in the patriarch's mind, with the fulfilment of God's eternal promises.

It is impossible to pass from this without remarking that it throws most blessed light on our Saviour's declaration that Abraham rejoiced and was glad, when he saw his coming day. For if the things of which we have now spoken, were present

¹ Isaiah ii. 2. Micah iv. 2. Zechariah viii. 23.

* For both these points see Part III. Lecture VIII.

² Genesis xv. 7.

⁴ Revelation xxii. 1. Ezekiel xlvii. 1—12.

to his mental vision, he could not be otherwise than glad. Such joy-inspiring anticipations strengthened him also, as well they might, to leave his country and his father's house. They were a cordial to his heart, as he pursued his toilsome way, and kept it from sinking utterly, as the distant hills of his native land at last disappeared from his straining eye. They made him cheerfully content to leave to his posterity the reversion of his earthly expectations in Canaan; he knew that when his Lord came, he should inherit that promised land. "My pilgrim-life shall be ended then," said Abraham, "when the holy Jerusalem, his dwelling-place, shall descend out of heaven from God; then shall I see the glory of Immanuel my promised Seed; then too shall I see this land of Canaan, no longer defiled by the bloody rites of idolatry, but the glory of all lands, and the light of salvation to all the nations of the earth. I am indeed, meanwhile, a stranger in it, but having these hopes, I am content."

It is equally impossible to avoid remarking on the illustration thus afforded to us of the genuine nature and necessary results of faith. For the city which was the object of Abraham's expectation is not yet revealed, and it is needless therefore to point out that God's word must have been his only evidence that it should ever be revealed at all. The language of the Saviour, "Abraham saw my day," has already been referred to; it exhibits the patriarch's faith as "the substance of things hoped for." And this is the character of all true faith; "We look," says St. Paul, "at the things not seen."¹ Such language is a contradiction to sense. How can a man look, asks human reason, at things which he cannot see? Because God sees every thing, past, present, and to come; and through confidence in his veracity, we see with his eyes, and gaze upon invisibles. And it is no shadowy expectation, no uncertain hope which we are thus enabled to cherish. Abraham's whole life was influenced, as we have now seen, by his faith in these promises of God; calm confidence in the Divine veracity, and steady assurance of the fulfilment of his gracious words, clothed the far-distant

¹ II Corinthians iv. 18.

future with the distinct characters of present reality. And it is so with every true Christian. He walks by faith: the life which he lives in the flesh is by the faith of the Son of God.¹

Reserving for the next lecture, when the subject will come again before us, the peculiar application to the Hebrews, of this history of their father Abraham, let us consider in few words, the lessons which it teaches to us. His faith is our reproof; his conduct is our example. It is a very common idea that the worthies of old time had a glimpse of Christ's coming to make atonement for sin; but that there their faith terminated. There cannot be a greater misapprehension. We have learnt already from the history of Enoch, that they looked for his coming in Divine glory and majesty, to destroy the works of the devil. And I very much question whether the patriarch Abraham, living as he did, in a day of comparative darkness, was not better acquainted than we are, with the final purposes of God. St. John had not then announced his vision of the new Jerusalem, and yet Abraham looked for it. The Church has now been privileged with this vision for nearly two thousand years; and yet very few of us understand it, very few of us know what to look for. We are not without fault in this ignorance. Speculation in matters of prophecy, is indeed to be guarded against; but we are criminal in remaining ignorant of the great outlines of the purpose of God. This ignorance moreover will lead us seriously astray. Communion with God is the animating principle both of prayer and exertion in his cause; but if we are ignorant of his purposes, we cannot have communion with him. And we shall labour in consequence, for what is not to be brought about, and pray for that in which he cannot hear us. This remark is especially applicable to the subject of missions. It is of the utmost importance that the Church of God, in her labours among the heathen, should understand the work which is given into her hands; God by her would "visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name."² Because if instead of

¹ II Corinthians v. 7. Galatians ii. 20

² Acts xv. 14.

understanding this, she expects to convert the whole world, and to bring about the reign of universal blessedness and peace, without Jewish instrumentality and the revelation of the new Jerusalem, she is expecting that which she shall never see. Disappointment will damp her zeal and paralyze her noblest energies. Let us shew ourselves then to be Abraham's children by cherishing the expectations of Abraham. These cheering expectations, let me further remark, will sustain the heart amid the trials and disappointments of time. There is no earthly hope which we can cherish, in which we are not doomed, in one way or other, to disappointment. All things were once very good; but the blight of sin has now passed over them, and they have become uncertain, transitory, and vain. But there is one thing, blessed be God, to which neither uncertainty nor vanity belong,—that city whose walls are salvation and whose gates are praise, of which it is little to say that it mocks the changes of time, for it shall endure through a changeless eternity. And remembering continually that we are its citizens, and looking for its glorious revelation, we shall be strengthened to bear up under the sorrows of an hour, by the prospect of joys which shall never end. By the same hope, let me observe, the hope which comforted the heart of Abraham, we shall be strengthened to follow that sainted patriarch's example, doing the will of God, however grievous to flesh and blood. We know well how the heart of man clings to his native country. Speaking of a native air heard in a foreign clime, the poet says—

"I deemed it the lament of men
Who languished for their native glen."

Inspiration itself has borne witness to this. "Weep ye not for the dead, neither bemoan him," says Jeremiah: "but weep sore for him that goeth away: for he shall return no more, nor see his native country."¹ But this was the trial of Abraham. He was called to exile himself from the

¹ Jeremiah xxii. 10.

land of his nativity; and when "he went out," he returned no more. God indeed blessed him in all things, but still he was an exile. And if he did not weep sore after his kindred and father's house, if he was not a heart-sick and pining exile, the text informs us that it was because he looked for the city of God. His obedience then is our example. We are not placed indeed in his peculiar circumstances, but this makes no essential difference. None of us may expect to finish our Christian course without being called to make many sacrifices, and to do many things in God's service from which nature would fain be excused. But the faith and hope of Abraham, that faith which looks for the recompense of the reward, will strengthen us, I repeat, to "do the works of Abraham," and will prepare us to be gathered at last into Abraham's bosom. Which may God grant to us of his infinite mercy!

See Appendix, Note N.

LECTURE X.

Hebrews xi. 11—18.

“Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised. Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable. These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”

THE Apostle, pursuing his illustrations of faith, presents it to us in these verses, in its nature, its reward, its natural and necessary results. The case of Sarah, with which the text opens, is an apt illustration of its nature; whilst the fulfilment of the promise on which she relied, is an equally apt illustration of its reward. The ample accomplishment, on the part of the Divine Promiser, of all those good words on which Abraham and Sarah together had relied, is next referred to, in attestation of the certainty and abundance of that reward. And the text then concludes with a general survey of the characters of Abraham and his family; shewing us at once what faith is, and what its necessary results are. We are thus furnished with another proof of the correctness of St. Paul's definition of this grace: the truth of his statement that it obtains the approbation of God is also further established and confirmed.

Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.

It is impossible to do justice to the meaning of these words without a brief reference to the dealings of God with Abraham and his helpmate, recorded in the book of Genesis. Superficial readers of that book imagine that before Abraham left Chaldea, or at least as early as his arrival in Canaan, God made to him the promise of a son by Sarah. This is a most serious misapprehension of the truth of the matter, and renders the words before us totally unintelligible. For if the expostulation, "To me thou hast given no seed," and the taking of Hagar, by Sarah's counsel, to be his wife, were both subsequent to the promise in question, where was the faith either of Abraham or of Sarah? They were patterns of unbelief rather than of trust in God. Again, we must remember that more than twenty-five years elapsed between Abraham's leaving Chaldea and the birth of Isaac. And if Sarah received therefore at the beginning of that period, the Divine assurance that she should be the mother of the seed, it is impossible to understand the commendation here bestowed on her; for we find her at the end of it, within a few months of the birth of Isaac, laughing within herself, as if the thing were impossible. She had meditated on the Divine promise, for five and twenty years, and still she was not believing it! This could not be the case with the wife of the father of the faithful. A right understanding of her history and of God's dealings with her and her husband, clears up these difficulties and completely explains the text. God revealed his mind to Abraham and Sarah by degrees. When the patriarch came into Canaan, he told him that he would give that land to his seed. But was that seed to be an adopted child or a child of his own body? On that point God was silent. Abraham, naturally desirous of knowing the truth on so important a matter, ventured to say, in the words already quoted "To me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house in mine heir." This led to a

more unambiguous declaration of God's purpose. "This shall not be thine heir" he said; "he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir." But who was to be the mother of this son of Abraham? On that point God was still silent. It was whilst this silence continued, that Sarah counselled her husband to take, according to the custom of those times, a second and inferior wife. He followed the counsel, and a child was born to him; but the issue of this step was disappointment, and for fourteen years he had no communication from on high. At the end of that period, and just a year previous to the birth of the promised seed, GOD BROKE THE SILENCE OF FOUR AND TWENTY YEARS, and declared that he should be the offspring of Sarah. The faith even of Abraham was hardly able at once to grasp this; and we need not be surprised that when an announcement so amazing was for the first time made to Sarah, she should have laughed within herself at the apparent impossibility of its fulfilment. But God sharply reproved her laughter, and "a reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool."¹ Sarah took the reproof, and believed God. And "because she judged him faithful who had promised," she "was delivered of a child, when she was past age."²

I have entered into this explanation because it is of the utmost importance that we should understand the characters of the father and mother of the faithful. We find something like impatience in Abraham; and we find Sarah resorting to carnal devices to accomplish the Divine purpose; and so far they are not to be commended. But we do not find a single instance in the history of either, of disbelief of God's word, after he had plainly spoken; in that point they are our patterns. And the faith of Sarah, in the instance now before us, corresponded in the most striking manner with the Apostle's definition of faith. Two circumstances in her condition rendered it unpromising to the last degree, she had always been barren, and she was then ninety years old. It is certain therefore that God's word was her only

¹ Proverbs. xvii. 10.

² Genesis xii.—xviii. xxi. 1. 2.

evidence that she should ever become a mother. But she took that word as her evidence, "she judged him faithful;" and "through" this "faith" says the text, "Sarah herself," i.e. barren, aged Sarah was delivered of the child of promise. We see in this also the reward of faith. It was a rich reward, as the name of the child indicates; for Isaac signifies laughter, gladness of heart. "God" said the joyful mother, "hath made me to laugh...Who would have said to Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have borne him a son in my old age."¹ Let us remember this dealing of God, when we are disposed to question his faithfulness. SARAH, WITH HER SILVER HAIRS, AND HER INFANT AT HER BREAST, may well put unbelief to shame.

But the birth of Isaac was only the first fruits of this reward; he was the acorn from which the mighty oak was to spring. St. Paul proceeds,—

Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.

Of Isaac came Jacob; of him came the twelve patriarchs; and of them came the countless thousands of Israel. The words before us state the exact truth, for the numbers of the chosen people exceeded all calculation. Two hundred and fifty years only after their fathers had gone down into Egypt "threescore and ten persons," Moses could congratulate them; "now the Lord hath made thee as the stars of heaven for multitude."² And we read of them, four hundred and fifty years afterwards, "Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is by the sea in multitude."³ This increase was preternatural, and was the effect of a peculiar blessing. And we need not ask the reason of this blessing if we attend to the language of the text. St. Paul tells us by the word "therefore," which looks back to the four preceding verses, that this extraordinary increase, this issuing of countless

¹ Genesis xxi. 6. 7. Boothroyd's Translation.

² Deuteronomy x. 22.

³ I Kings iv. 20.

thousands from the loins of one man, "and him as good as dead," was the reward of faith. The promise of the seed and the promise of the land were one, and it was by faith in these promises that Abraham sojourned in the land. This also was the reason of his being called Abraham, which signifies the father of a multitude; he was so, the Apostle tells us, in the sight of him whom he believed.¹ And the faith of Sarah co-operated with his, to bring about the accomplishment of these promises. We have already seen that her faith agreed with St. Paul's definition; and the same may be said of her husband's. "Against hope" the apostle tells us, "he believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken...He considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:...he was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform."² And it was because he thus honoured God, taking his word against reason, sense, and probability, as his evidence of the coming blessing, that he received so glorious a recompense. The words "them that honour me I will honour,"³ were thus accomplished in him and in his partner. She, because she judged God faithful, became the mother of the promised seed; and he, a feeble old man tottering on the verge of the grave, became, because he believed him, the father of a progeny which no human arithmetic could number.

But this glorious recompense of faith was not bestowed during Abraham's lifetime, or even during that of his son and grandson. St. Paul proceeds,—

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.

Abraham and Sarah had the Divine promise that their seed should be multiplied; but they did not witness its

¹ Romans iv. 16, 17.

² Romans iv. 18—21.

³ I Samuel ii. 30.

fulfilment. Sarah saw only Isaac; and even Abraham, who survived her for forty years, saw no more than Isaac's family. Isaac in his turn, saw the families of Esau and Jacob; and Jacob saw the families of his twelve sons. The increase of the seed of promise was, in their days, very slow; within a few years of the death of Jacob, it amounted only to seventy souls. But the faith of "all these," says the Apostle, though it was tried, remained unshaken; they died in the steadfast assurance that the promises of God should be fulfilled. We must not however so lightly esteem the fathers of the holy nation, as to imagine that the multiplication of their seed was their chief object of faith and desire. Such a desire would have been purely selfish; and its fulfilment therefore could not have been an object of faith. A striking instance of the truth of this statement occurs in Old-Testament history. God threatened on one occasion, that he would destroy Israel; "and I will make of thee" he said to Moses, "a great nation."¹ But Moses, instead of accepting the offer, besought him to turn from his purpose. For the glory of God and the blessedness of his people were dearer in his servant's eyes than the aggrandisement of his own family and the honour of his own name. And it was just because these patriarchs had the spirit of Moses, that the promise of the multiplication of their seed was to them so precious. It was indissolubly connected with the furtherance of the Divine glory and the accomplishment of man's salvation. Of that seed was to come the Saviour, who in the fulness of time should make atonement for man's transgression; who should also bruise the destroyer's head, and bring in the eternal kingdom. He was to them the soul of all the promises; and it was in faith of his coming that they both lived and died. The context presented them to us as living in this faith; it told us that Abraham, and Isaac and Jacob after him, dwelt as pilgrims in the land of Canaan, because they looked for the revelation of the new Jerusalem from heaven. And the text, following up the context, tells us that they died in it. Let us turn for confirmation of this,

¹ Exodus xxxii. 9—14.

to the death-bed scene of Jacob. We find him blessing his twelve sons; uttering by the Spirit of God, sure prophecies of the multiplication of their seed; foretelling also the position in the land of Canaan, and the individual history of the tribe which should proceed from each of them. But these things were not the terminating object of the patriarch's expectation: "I have waited" he exclaims, "for THY SALVATION, O Lord." He had waited for it, and was then waiting; he had lived and was dying in faith of the coming Saviour. We have further proof of this in the rest of his dying words. In the blessing of Judah he makes distinct mention of the Shiloh, adding that "unto him shall the gathering of the people be;" and in the blessing of Joseph he declares that from the mighty God there shall yet proceed "the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel."¹ Jesus then was the object of Jacob's dying expectation; Jesus, as the good Shepherd who should give his life for the sheep, as the rock on which God's Church should be builded and should rest, as the King of righteousness and peace, to whom all nations should be gathered. The details of the book of Genesis explain the words of the text.

What makes this example of faith more striking, is that the object of it was "seen" by these patriarchs "afar off." Thick darkness then brooded over all the earth; and ages were to roll over the world before the promise of God to send his Son, even the first time, could be accomplished. But "faith is the substance of things hoped for;" and though the glorious Sun of righteousness appeared in their days, through the dim distance, like a twinkling star, these patriarchs saw his revelation. For what appears to the naked eye a twinkling star, is a sun when seen through the telescope, and fills the heavens with light. Judging by the eye, we should pronounce it an easy thing to extinguish one of these spangles which adorn the heavens; but the discoveries of the telescope inform us that no created power can move from the place assigned to it by the Almighty, the most inconsiderable of them all. And the faith of these

¹ Genesis xlix. 1—27.

patriarchs was like the telescope ; it gave body and substantial form to its yet very distant object, revealing its vast, its infinite dimensions. Human reason derided their expectations as visionary, and of more than uncertain fulfilment ; but they “ were persuaded of them.” They knew them to be founded on the promises of God. And assured that no created power could make the Almighty falter in his purpose or break his pledged word, they “ embraced ” these promises, as their hope, their confidence and their stay. We have already learned that Abraham was strengthened by them, to leave his native land and sojourn as an exile in Canaan : we have also learned from Jacob’s own mouth, that they cheered his troubled life and smoothed his dying pillow.

Let us also observe the result of this faith : they “ confessed they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.” For the whole earth had at that period, departed from the true God, into open and shameless idolatry ; and those who knew his name and trusted in his salvation, could not be otherwise than strangers in it. This therefore was the case with these servants of God. The thoughts and feelings, the manners and ways of an idolatrous world were strange to them ; and their principles of action were equally strange to the people among whom they dwelt. They were also pilgrims ; this world was not their home. It did not meet their desires, and they did not meet its wishes ; they could abide in it for a season, on their way to a better country, but more they could not do. Their lives declared this openly. Abraham left his native land in testimony against the Chaldean, and sojourned in Canaan in testimony against the Canaanite. And his son and grandson followed his example, “ dwelling in tabernacles,” and refusing to seek or to accept of any settlement, lest their families should be contaminated by the wickedness of the land. For while Esau, who was destitute of their faith, found an early settlement in Mount Seir, “ Jacob dwelt in the land wherein his father was a stranger, in the land of Canaan.”¹

“ HEARKEN to me,” says Christ by the mouth of Isaiah,

¹ Genesis xxxvii. 1.

"ye that follow after righteousness, ye that seek the Lord: look unto the rock whence ye are hewn...look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. For the Lord shall comfort Zion." "Fear ye not the reproach of men," he continues, "neither be ye afraid of their revilings...The redeemed of the Lord shall return, and come with singing unto Zion; and everlasting joy shall be upon their head."¹ St. Paul seems to have had these words of the prophet in his mind; for the train of thought in the text and preceding context, is in all respects the same. You complain of your circumstances, he says to the afflicted Hebrews; think on those of your father Abraham. He was an exile, a stranger, and a pilgrim; but he fainted not, because he was persuaded of the promises and had embraced them, and was looking for the city of God. You have the same God to trust in, and the same city to look for; be conformed then to his example; and instead of fearing the reproach of men, make cheerful and open confession that you are "strangers and pilgrims on the earth." You say that there is no outward indication of the fulfilment of the words of the the Lord. Was there any such indication in the case of Abraham and of Sarah? When they wandered, aged and solitary, through the promised land, could anything be conceived more against all human probabilities, than that their seed should be as the dust of the earth, that God would make nations of them, and that kings should come out of them?² Nevertheless they believed his word, and you know that they have not been disappointed. In the days of Israel's glory, when David and Solomon sat on the throne of the kingdom, all nations witnessed its accomplishment; and even now, when that glory has departed, the existence of our nation testifies that God is true. Now the same God has said that he will "comfort Zion." And as surely as he who was called alone, is now increased to a multitude, so surely shall God's redeemed ones yet return from their sorrow, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy on their heads.

¹ Isaiah li. 1—11.² Genesis xvii. 5, 6, 15, 16.

The words of the text however had an application yet more special, to the feelings of those to whom they were addressed. The Hebrews were disappointed, as is plain from other parts of this epistle, that their Lord delayed so long to come and receive them to himself. Hope deferred had at last made the heart sick; they had become impatient, and were tempted to murmur against God. It was not therefore, as I conceive, without an important reason, that the Apostle reminded them, that Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, "all died in faith, not having received the promises." It was in effect saying, if it is God's will that you die as your fathers have done, and that Christ come not in your day, be content with the Divine appointment, and die in faith. These promises may be yet comparatively far off, but they are much nearer now than in the days of these illustrious saints. Well then, he would say, may you follow their example, being persuaded of these promises and embracing them. And though you may have passed from this earthly scene before their accomplishment, well does it become you, for the sake of the joy which they minister, to bear all earthly suffering and to sacrifice all earthly joy.

Let us now consider the application of this subject to ourselves. It is impossible to refrain from repeating the remark of the last lecture, viz. that the faith of these saints is our reproof. How very different were their circumstances from ours! There was in their days no written revelation; no evidence from accomplished promise and prophecy, of the faithfulness of God; no miraculous witness to the true religion; no visible proof of the reality of redeeming love. Theirs therefore was faith in its purest form; God had spoken, and they believed him. It is very different with us. We have God's written revelation, handed down to us as such, by the concurrent testimony of believing generations; we have evidence the most ample, from accomplished promise and prophecy, that all its declarations are true; we have miraculous witness that Jesus is the Saviour; we have his bitter cross as the visible demonstration of the love of God to man. That love was in their days, mere promise; in

ours it is glorious accomplishment: it was then a distant, twinkling star; it is now a meridian sun, filling the heavens with its light, and cheering us with the warmth of its gracious beams. It is astonishing that in their day, such faith as they possessed was found in a human heart; it is equally astonishing that in our day, any unbelief is found. The one circumstance proves that Divine grace can triumph over the greatest disadvantages; the other proves that human depravity can render nugatory the greatest advantages. With all our spiritual privileges, Abraham the Chaldean idolater is our pattern of faith; and the most honourable place which we can hope to occupy is that of his disciples and his children.¹ Let us be his disciples, let us be his children! Jesus who died for us has now gone to prepare for his people, that new Jerusalem for which Abraham looked, and soon will come again to receive them to himself.² Let us then, believing in His love, be persuaded of His promises of glory, now hastening to their accomplishment, and embrace them with our whole hearts as our hope and daily consolation.

And I must repeat another remark of the last lecture, viz. that their conduct is our example. The world has not changed its character since the days of these early disciples; and confession that we are strangers and pilgrims on the earth is therefore to this day, the result of faith in God. The mass of mankind are utterly forgetful of God; their maxims, principles, and motives of action are not taken from his word: their cares and interests, their joys and sorrows, have nothing to do with him or with his service. But faith "worketh by love;" and the believer therefore cannot be forgetful of God. His maxims and principles are taken from the word of truth: his ruling motive is that the love of Christ constrains him: the continual care of his life is to please God and to win his approbation; and all his joys, sorrows, and interests partake of the same holy character. He cannot therefore be otherwise than a stranger on the earth; the world does not understand him, and he

¹ Romans iv. 11—25. Galatians iii. 29.

² John xiv. 2, 3.

does not understand the world. Unbelief makes us strangers to God, and enables us to understand the world; and faith brings us near to God, and makes us strangers to the world. "Ye walked in time past" says St. Paul to the Ephesians, "according to the course of this world,...being strangers from the covenants of promise...and without God." But ye are now, he continues, "made nigh by the blood of Christ;...ye are no more strangers...but of the household of God."¹ The world as a necessary consequence, ceased to understand them. "They think it strange," says St. Peter, "that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you."² And so long as God and the world preserve their respective characters, this must be the result of faith. And the same faith which makes us strangers, will teach us also to be pilgrims on the earth. The characters indeed are one; the pilgrim's habit and language are both strange; he is passing through a strange country to the land in which he seeks a home. The unbeliever therefore is not a pilgrim; the earth is his home and resting-place, and he looks for nothing beyond it. And for the same reason the believer is a pilgrim; he looks with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob for the new Jerusalem, as his final and blessed abode. He follows, in doing so, higher example than theirs. "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end."³ The Father's bosom was the resting-place to which that blessed pilgrim looked; "Holy Father" were his words, "I come to thee." And Christ's bosom is, after his example, the resting-place to which his believing people look; they are "his own," "not of the world," even as he was "not of the world;" and they judge with his servant, that to be with him, "is far better."⁴ He that is not of this mind, has never seen Christ's glory, or set his heart on his eternal promises. If we are of this mind, we shall still further follow the example of these sainted patriarchs, by shewing it in our lives. The word "confessed," signifies made

¹ Ephesians ii. 2, 12, 13, 19. ² I Peter iv. 4. ³ John xlii. 1.

⁴ John xvii. 11, 16. Philipplians i. 23.

open profession; and with this, the record of their lives agrees. Let us be emboldened then to make the same profession. Let us shew by our life in the family, by the way in which we order our houses, by our dealings in business, and by all our conversation among men, that we have faith in Christ, and are indeed the people of God. Profession indeed ought never to go beyond reality, but it ought to be an index of reality, an index so plain that those who run may read. And being "followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises," we shall at last obtain their blessing; for "the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever." Which may God of his infinite mercy grant to us!

1 I John ii. 17.

LECTURE XI.

Hebrews xi. 14—16.

"For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city."

WE have just been told concerning Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, that they were persuaded of God's promises and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. It was this hearty persuasion which strengthened them to make such a confession; "for they that say such things," the Apostle continues in the words before us, i. e. they that surrender their part and portion in the world that now is, "declare plainly that they seek" another. "And truly," he goes on to say, had these patriarchs "been mindful of the country," Ur of the Chaldees, "from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned." But they did not return. And this was not because they preferred Canaan; for Canaan was not their country, it was the land wherein they were strangers. They sought "a better country, even an heavenly;" and therefore their lives were those of men who acted for God's approbation, and had respect to the recompense of his reward. And the Apostle gives us to understand that they have obtained what they sought. For in recompense of their faith and self-denying obedience, and because

"He hath prepared for them a city" of habitation, "God" he declares, "is not ashamed to be called their God." Such is the substance of these verses. We shall now, by God's help, enter on their consideration in detail.

For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek
A FATHERLAND.

I have rendered the last word of this verse with the intensity of the original, which signifies a home, a native country, a fatherland. A man must have some home to look to, some country which he can call his, some land of which he can say,

"This is my own, my native land,"

or his heart will faint within him. And if these patriarchs therefore made open confession that they could not find such a country on the earth, it is plain that there was some home beyond it on which their hearts were set, some fatherland with which these sacred feelings were associated. But why was it that they could not be contented with this earth as their country? why was it that the whole world could not provide them with *a home*? Let us carry back our thoughts to the happy days of our childhood, and conjure up the nameless charm which that sacred word brings along with it. We were then a family of brothers and sisters, dwelling under one paternal roof, and bound together by that common tie; we went in and out at the bidding of one father and mother, and their will and word were law to us. Now were the inhabitants of the earth such a family as this in the days of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Alas! it was far otherwise. They knew for themselves, and loved and feared the great and good Parent of mankind: but the people among whom they were, knew not his very name; and instead of keeping his commandments, bowed down to dumb idols, and served the works of their own hands. We need not wonder then that these holy patriarchs could not feel themselves at home in such a world, that they could not look round on brutish

idolaters, and recognize themselves as dwelling among brethren. Let us look on the matter in another light. The charm which endears our native country, is that we have been accustomed from infancy to the manners, ways, and habits of its people; we dislike the manners and ways of a foreign land, and long for our own country and our own dear people again. Now the manners and ways of the idolatrous heathen among whom they dwelt, were totally dissimilar to those of these godly patriarchs; and they could not therefore feel themselves among their own people, or recognize this earth as their own country. But they cherished the hope of one day finding themselves at home, of one day finding a country which they could truly call their own. They looked for the regeneration, when the kingdom of their Father should come, when his name should be hallowed, and his will should be done on earth as now it is done in heaven. They knew that they should then find a people whose feelings, manners, and ways should be like their own; and that with that people, even all the company of the just, they should be privileged to serve and glorify God for ever. For they waited, as the context tells us, for the revelation of the city of God, "the heavenly Jerusalem;" they expected to come to "the general assembly and Church of the first-born," the destined heirs of its glory; they knew that he was its "builder and maker," "of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named."¹ And the hope of being one day in his blessed presence, of finding themselves with his children and their brethren, with his people and their people; this hope, I repeat, cherished in the secret of their hearts, enabled them while on earth to endure their pilgrim-lot.

But they did more than endure it; it was the object of their deliberate choice. St. Paul goes on to say,—

And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is an heavenly.

¹ Hebrews xii. 22, 23. Ephesians iii. 15.

Ur of the Chaldees. as has been already mentioned, was the country from whence they came out, and Canaan was the land in which they sojourned. The time of Abraham's sojourning was an hundred years; whilst that of Isaac and Jacob, was during the term of their natural lives. They had abundant opportunity then to have returned whence they came; no man detained them in Canaan against their will. And God on his part, to try what was in them, seemed to design to drive them out of it. For he sent, during the life of each of them, such sore and grievous famines on that land of promise, that they were compelled successively to arise and leave it.¹ They had then a fair excuse for returning to the land of their nativity. But they took no advantage of it; Isaac went down to Gerar, whilst Abraham and Jacob after him, found a temporary refuge in Egypt. Their eyes however were still toward Canaan; Abraham and Isaac returned on the first opportunity, and Jacob with his dying breath, laid it as a duty on his children.² It is most striking to observe the determination of the patriarchs on this subject. When Abraham's faithful servant proposed to take Isaac to Chaldea, that he might choose for himself a wife from among the kindred of his father, "BEWARE THOU" said the aged man of God, "THAT THOU BRING NOT MY SON THITHER AGAIN."³ And this was not because Canaan was fairer than Chaldea: it was the better, the heavenly country which was fairer in their eyes. That better country is Immanuel's land, the blessed rest of Jesus; the rest "which remaineth for the people of God,"⁴ and which shall be revealed in the day of glory. These patriarchs knew that if they were to be instrumental in its revelation, it was absolutely needful that they should preserve their families uncontaminated by idolatry and wickedness, and cleave to the land of promise. And setting aside therefore the love of country and every feeling to which the heart by nature clings, they continued cheerfully and gladly to obey the voice of the Lord.

¹ Genesis xii. 10. Genesis xxvi. 1. Genesis xlvii. 11—13.

² Genesis xlviii. 21.

³ Genesis xxiv. 6.

⁴ Hebrews iv. 9.

We discern in all this the genuine character and necessary results of faith. And in what remains of the text, we have a more glorious proof than we have ever yet met with, that it wins God's approbation and obtains the recompense of his reward. For we read,

Wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he hath prepared for them a city.

Three things occur to the mind on the perusal of these words. Our attention is arrested, in the first place, by the astonishing greatness of the blessing bestowed on these patriarchs. It is drawn in the second place, to the proof which God has given, that he really has bestowed it. And we have in the third place, the most distinct and positive assurance that this blessing was the recompense of faith.

1st. The blessing itself is contained in few words, but no human language can express their import. "God" says the apostle, "is not ashamed to be called their God." Here is first, eternal life,—“is not ashamed ;” second, the esteem and friendship of the Most High,—“not ashamed to be called their God ;” third, the assurance of infinite and boundless blessedness,—“God....their God.” A little consideration will prove the justice of this comment. Eternal life is not the happiness of the spirit only ; it is the glorious resurrection of the body also, and the enjoyment both by body and spirit, of the blessed God for ever. We are taught this by our Lord himself. The Sadducees denied the resurrection of the dead. “Now that the dead are raised” he said, “even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living : for all live unto him.”¹ These words refer us to the book of Exodus, where God at the bush desires Moses to tell the children of Israel, “the Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you : this

¹ Luke xx. 37. 38.

is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations."¹ This proves, said our Lord to the Sadducees, that when God spake to Moses at the bush, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive in his bosom and awaiting the resurrection of the just; for God is not a God of the dead; all whose God he is, live unto him. By parity of reason then, these patriarchs were alive in the same bosom, awaiting the same resurrection, when St. Paul wrote this epistle; for he says, not that God was not, as if he spake of a past transaction, but that he is not ashamed to be called their God. They shall also be alive in that bosom, awaiting that resurrection until the end of time; for their God, as was declared at the bush, is His memorial "unto all generations." And after the promise of resurrection shall have been accomplished in the Divine faithfulness, they shall abide in that bosom in consummation of bliss to all eternity; for their God, he said again, is "my name for ever." It shall be the consummation of bliss indeed, for they have the esteem and friendship of the Most High. The spirit of Abraham in the bosom of God, was enjoying this sacred communion when Isaiah prophesied; God said then of Israel, they are "the seed of Abraham my friend."² The language of the text shews this in a most striking manner. We form our judgment of a man from the company which he keeps, and from the character of those whom he chooses for his friends. The righteous are ashamed to be seen in company with the wicked; the just and upright are ashamed of any connection with the dishonest and the vile. We are permitted by God, to form in the same manner our judgment of His character. To the end of time, he says to Moses in the words already quoted, nay to all eternity I desire to be judged by this, viz. that I was and am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. While the world shall last, I desire that their histories be read, and that those who read them say, these were the men whose friend the Almighty was. I am "not ashamed" that my name should be associated with theirs, and that my character should be judged of by what was seen in them.

¹ Exodus iii. 15² Isaiah xli. 8.

It is impossible to conceive commendation to go beyond this ; God himself cannot say more. And when we consider that he who speaks thus is God, the Source of infinite joy, and that because he is their God, the ever-flowing fountain of living waters is freely and for ever at their command, imagination is baffled, and thought confounded. It cannot enter into the heart of man to conceive the largeness of their blessing.

2nd. God has given substantial proof that he has bestowed this blessing on them, that he "is not ashamed to be called their God;" for "he hath prepared for them a city." This city we know to be the heavenly Jerusalem, "the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God." The context informs us that Abraham looked for it, yea that it was the common expectation of these sainted patriarchs. Jesus referred to it when he said to his disciples, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."¹ For this, as we have already learnt, is the purpose of the New Jerusalem; it is destined as the eternal abode of the Redeemer and his glorified saints. What a proof have we here that God is not ashamed of his people! He has prepared a city in which he shall dwell with them for ever. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob shall be seen by the side of their Divine Redeemer in that glorious abode, acknowledged, honoured, and exalted; yea they shall speak with him "face to face, as a man speaketh with his friend." No one may speak then in disparagement of those whom the Lord commends.

3rd. This inconceivably great and unspeakably precious blessing was bestowed on these patriarchs as the reward of faith; because they left their native land and sacrificed this world's advantages, having respect to the word and promise of a faithful God. "Now they desire a better country, even an heavenly," says St. Paul, "wherefore God is not ashamed to be their God;" yea, in eternal memorial of his esteem of faith and righteousness, "hath prepared for them a city."

¹ John xiv. 2, 3.

Let no one be offended at this saying; let no one say, surely no righteousness of ours can win the approbation of the Most High. We have already learnt from the case of Enoch, a lesson of the utmost importance, which is confirmed by the words before us. It is of grace that we are permitted to return to God, and accepted of him in Christ. But after we have returned and have been accepted, we may so walk by the Holy Spirit given to us, as to attract the notice of his approving eye. It was so with these holy patriarchs. Abraham is the prototype of the justified by faith, the saved by grace; and yet he with his son and grandson, are examples of that righteousness which pleases God. He saw that their hearts were set on his promises; that they did not look back with one feeling of regret to that wicked world which they had left; that every worldly thought, feeling, and desire were swallowed up in communion with his mighty purpose, in earnest longing to promote his glory. And therefore he was not ashamed to associate his name with theirs. He was not ashamed to do so, though he was the great God and they were children of the dust; yea, he was not ashamed, though he was the Holy One, and they were full of imperfection, sin, and shortcoming. For he knew that these shortcomings were their burden and grief, and that their hearts were His alone.

It is needless to say that the sacrifices made by these patriarchs for the name and service of God, are not to be compared, for an instant, with a recompense so glorious as this. They left their country and kindred; they were sojourners in a strange land; they were contented to seem, in the eyes of men, a singular people, and perhaps to be the laughing-stock of the heathen. But in exchange for an earthly home thus willingly abandoned, and for the favour of man thus cheerfully sacrificed, they have found an eternal home in the bosom of Godhead, they have been privileged with the esteem and friendly regard of the Most High. Theirs has been indeed the choice of wisdom. May we, through Divine mercy, be found as truly wise!

If there was any thing in which a Hebrew gloried, it was

in being a circumcised son of Abraham. St. Paul had reminded the believing Jews at Rome, in an epistle written a few years previously, that Abraham "received the sign of circumcision," that he might be "the father of circumcision, to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham."¹ And he now tells their believing brethren in Palestine, what these steps were, that they might know in what they boasted, when they called that sainted patriarch their father. Such a boast, the Apostle would say, lays you under the obligation of following his bright example. Do you find it a hard thing to give up the world, to have your property spoiled, your persons denounced, your lives threatened? Abraham shewed that he sought a country by confessing himself a stranger and pilgrim on the earth. Are you tempted to look back with regret on worldly advantages sacrificed; are you tempted to return to the religion of your fathers, that you may secure them again? Abraham and your fathers Isaac and Jacob after him, were not even "mindful of the country from whence they came out;" if it had been otherwise, "they might have had opportunity to have returned." Are you sometimes tempted to ask, for what are all these sacrifices and what shall be their recompense? The God of the fathers will be the God of the children: following the steps of their faith you shall yet "sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven."²

This subject is also full of consolation, instruction, and warning, applicable to all ages of the Church.

It is full of consolation. It was not written for their sakes alone, that God was not ashamed to be called the God of Abraham and his sons. That patriarch "received the sign of circumcision,...that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also."³ And again we read, "They which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."⁴ So that if we believe on Jesus as these patriarchs did, we

¹ Romans iv. 11, 12.

² Matthew viii. 11.

³ Romans iv. 11.

⁴ Galatians iii. 9.

are heirs to the blessing of the text, in all its richness and inconceivably vast amount: he who is their God will be our God also. He will not be ashamed to be called so; he is ashamed of none that trust in him: he said to the dying thief, "To-day shalt thou be with me in paradise."¹ And if we look for the revelation of his glory as these patriarchs looked, that glory shall yet be bestowed on us, to our eternal joy. The crown of righteousness which "at that day, the righteous Judge shall give," is not for Apostles only, but for "all them also that love his appearing."² Moreover, he who said to Abraham, "Walk before me, and be thou perfect,"³ can enable us to follow our father's bright example, exhibiting in all we do, the same blessed fruit of faith. It is not that we shall be unconscious of sins and shortcomings: they cleaved to these sainted patriarchs, and will cleave to us to the end. But with all its imperfections and shortcomings, the life and conversation of the man who trusts in redeeming mercy, looks for the eternal kingdom, and has a reference in all which he does, to God's service and glory, is as far removed above that of the mere worldling, as the heaven is high above the earth. And God shall yet make manifest that this has been his judgment; that he has discerned between the righteous who serve him, and the wicked who serve him not;⁴ and that he has not been unobservant of the work and labour of love which his people have shewed toward his name.⁵ He shall stretch out his hand to them from the throne, saying, "Come, ye blessed, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."⁶ And when those on whom that blessing is pronounced, "shall shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father,"⁷ the Divine approbation of faith and righteousness shall be made manifest, as the light, for ever and ever. It shall indeed be known in that day, that "God is not ashamed" of his people; for these things shall not be done in a corner. The city which he has prepared, and in which he will dwell with them for ever, is

¹ Luke xxiii. 42, 43.² II Timothy iv. 8.³ Genesis xvii. 1.⁴ Malachi iii. 18.⁵ Hebrews vi. 10.⁶ Matthew xxv. 34.⁷ Matthew xiii. 43.

set on an hill, even on Mount Zion, and cannot be hid. And when all creatures shall repair to it, to pay their adoring homage to the Eternal King, they shall behold, not these sainted patriarchs only, but all his faithful people. They shall see them by his side, acknowledged and honoured as his trusted servants, his confidential friends and ministers, the children of his love. Holy Job who was contemporary with these patriarchs, expresses their very hope. "I know that my Redeemer liveth," he exclaims, "and though worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God."¹ And on the mount of transfiguration, which was designed as a foreshewing of the kingdom,² the disciples beheld Moses and Elias, and lo, as friend with friend, "THEY WERE TALKING WITH JESUS." These disciples being still in mortal flesh, were "sore afraid" when thus surrounded with glory; but Jesus touched them and said even then, "Arise, and be not afraid."³ And when this mortal shall have put on immortality, and this corruptible, incorruption, such fear shall be gone for ever. The glory of God shall be the light of the new Jerusalem, and shall be reflected with a brilliancy which no mortal eye could look upon, from the city itself which shall be of "pure gold, like unto clear glass," from the gates of pearl, and from the garniture of chrysolite, topaz, amethyst, and "all manner of precious stones."⁴ But the eye of the resurrection-body shall be able to endure it all, and look "undazzled by the blaze," upon "unclouded Deity." Glorious hope! Blessed, everlasting consolation!

This subject is full of instruction also. Under the experience of the afflictions and disappointments of life, many tell us that they comfort themselves with the hope of a better world. And when a member of their family, or any of their friends depart from this world, we very frequently hear, "They are gone, we trust, to a better." And this language is, alas, too often used by those and concerning those who, in their life and conversation, are and were conformed to all the evil ways of this world. Let us be

¹ Job xix. 25. 26. ² Matthew xvi. 28. Matthew xvii. 1. II Peter i. 16.

³ Matthew xvii. 1—7.

⁴ Revelation xxi. 10—23.

instructed on this point by the text. The holy patriarchs of whom we have been speaking, desired a better world; but they shewed their meetness for it by open and manifest separation from the sins and vanities of the world that now is. And this separation was as hearty as it was open; they were not even mindful of the follies which they had left behind them. This is the religion which pleases God, and prepares for the kingdom of heaven. It appears in the life, but its seat is in the heart. Let us "remember Lot's wife."¹ Her feet left Sodom, while her heart still lingered in it; and turning back to take a last look of the scene of her sinful pleasures, "she became a pillar of salt."² She is a beacon on the one hand, to warn us from a fatal shore; the example of these patriarchs is a light from God on the other, revealing the way of life. Let us follow that example then. Turning our backs upon the world, and setting our faces heavenward, let us with steadfastness of purpose pursue this way. Abhorring that which is evil and cleaving to that which is good, and making it the one aim of our lives and actions to do our Father's will and glorify his holy name, let us look for his eternal kingdom. If we are not found doing so, our hopes of a better world are all delusion. "There shall in no wise enter into" Christ's holy city, "anything that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie."³

These considerations remind us finally, that this subject is full of warning. God saw that these patriarchs believed his word: He who reads the heart discerned that his glory was the object for which they lived, and that his promises were their expectation. This faith and righteousness won his holy approbation; he was not ashamed to be connected with such men, "to be called their God." But if this be true, the opposite is also true. If this spirit of faith and obedience be lacking; if God see that we are living for no higher object than our own interest, and that we have no expectation beyond this present world, he will surely be ashamed of us; he will not be called our God. What a fearful thought is this! Can he who is our Creator and

¹ Luke xvii. 32.² Genesis xix. 26.³ Revelation xxi. 27.

Redeemer, he in whose name we were baptized, ever be ashamed to own us? It is indeed so. The character of God is implicated in that of his people, and he cannot therefore allow himself to be called the God of the unbelieving, the disobedient, and the worldly. The covenant of baptism is here no refuge for the wicked. A righteous father has a rebellious and abandoned son. You say to the parent, Is that youth your child? I am ashamed to own him, is the reply, I blush to be called his father. We can conceive in like manner, an angel of glory to bend his eye from heaven's purity, on the ungodliness of baptized men, and to ask in amazement, Lord God, are these thy children? And we know the answer,—I am ashamed to acknowledge that they are so, I blush to be called their father. This is no supposition, no figure of speech; God will yet make manifest its awful truth. In the day that is coming, though they have been baptized in his name, he will disown the unbelieving before assembling worlds; yea he will sever all connection between his purity and their defilement, and drive them from his presence for ever. "For the righteous Lord loveth righteousness," but his face "is against them that do evil."

God grant that in that day our portion may be with His people, that we may "have right to the tree of life, and enter in, through the gates, into the city!"

LECTURE XII.

Hebrews xi. 17—19.

"By faith, Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

SOME of us may think that we have already dwelt too long on the history of the patriarch Abraham. This however is not the mind of St. Paul; he continues his reference to it, in the verses which we have just read. We may certainly attribute this in part, to the veneration which he knew the Hebrews to entertain for Abraham; but he had another reason. His object is to present illustrations of faith; and the history of "the father of them that believe," necessarily abounds with such illustrations, beyond that of any man who ever lived in the world. Let us take as an example, that part of it to which the text refers. It reveals to us, at a glance, the nature, the results, and the reward of faith. We see its nature, viz. confidence in God, in a more striking manner than it has ever yet been displayed to us. In the cases hitherto cited, we have had words or promises of God believed; but in this case we have a man, in the absence of all word, yea left in the darkness of bewildering contradiction, trusting God in that darkness, and falling back on his everlasting faithfulness. We see its results also in a more striking manner than any former case displays. The son bound on the altar and prepared for death by the father's

hand, shews the unhesitating, unquestioning, devoted obedience which such glorious confidence in God inspires. While the same son restored with renewed assurance of blessing, and clasped to the joyful father's bosom, testifies to the rich reward which confidence in God and obedience to his word are sure to meet with from his generous hand.

It may assist us to a clearer understanding of this deeply interesting portion of the patriarch's history, if we consider, first, the obedience of Abraham; second, the faith which strengthened him to obey; and third, the reward which that faith and obedience received.

I. Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only-begotten son, of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

He "was tried" or tempted. "It came to pass," we read in the book of Genesis, "that God did tempt Abraham. Take now" he said to him, (as the words may be literally rendered) "that son, that only one of thine, whom thou lovest, that ISAAC; and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of."¹ We are not to understand from this, that God can tempt us, in the common acceptation of that term. St. James tells us expressly that as "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man."² It is the devil's work to do this. He sets forbidden gratifications before us, that he may excite evil desires, and thereby draw us into sin. But God nevertheless may tempt. He may bring us into circumstances in which it is a severe trial to nature or to grace to do his will; and then commanding us to do it, may prove thereby what is in us. It was thus that he now tried or tempted Abraham. The trial to nature is apparent on the very face of the command given to him: every word of it seems to have been designed to pierce deeper into his heart than that which preceded.

¹ Genesis xxii. 1, 2.

² James i. 13.

His son was to be taken from him, his only one, whom he loved as a son and as an only one, his Isaac, for whom he had waited five and twenty years, and at whose birth he had laughed for joy. That son was growing up before his father's eye, the joy and comfort of his aged heart, when God came thus suddenly upon him and demanded his cherished treasure. And he was not to be sent away as Ishmael had been; that would have been a small thing in comparison: he was to die. Nor was death to visit him according to the laws of nature, and as the effect of disease; the pang would in that case have been alleviated, for he might have breathed his last in his father's arms: he was to die by violence. The father's feelings moreover were not to be spared by his being permitted to be absent from the bloody tragedy; he was to be present, he was to be an actor, nay the principal actor in that tragedy; he was to slay his son, he was to bereave his old age with his own hand, of its cherished stay and comfort. Such was God's will, such was the command which it pleased him to give to Abraham. And dreadful as nature's trial was, we almost forget its severity in the much severer trial of grace; for it was "he that had received the promises," who "offered up his only-begotten son." Abraham had received the express and oft-repeated promises of God that Isaac should be the father of the great nation from whom the Messiah was to come. Isaac cannot die then, the patriarch might have said, for these promises must be fulfilled. But he must die, he might again have said, for God has spoken the word. If Isaac die, God's promise fails; his command is violated, if Isaac live. Here was in truth a perplexity: the man of faith must have been indeed "in a strait betwixt two." He had another son, and might have hoped, in the event of Isaac's death, to have become, through him, the father of the promised seed. But that hope was now cut off: Ishmael had been sent away by God's express command, and on his solemn assurance that "in Isaac" the promised seed should be called. St. Paul refers to this assurance in the text, and with singular propriety calls him concerning whom it was given, Abraham's "only-begotten son." He was so in

effect: on his life the father's hopes depended, and his death was the extinction of them all. But the spirit of the man of God rose above these perplexities, and the father refused to listen to the pleadings of nature. Having received the command, he "rose up early, and took Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt-offering, and went unto the place of which God had told him." When he approached it on the morning of the third day, "he took the wood of the burnt-offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son," he took also "the fire in his hand, and a knife," and "they went both of them together." Arrived at the fatal spot, "Abraham built an altar, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood, and STRETCHED FORTH HIS HAND, AND TOOK THE KNIFE TO SLAY HIM."¹ Thus grace triumphed, and nature also, because sustained by grace: the sacrifice was offered up on Abraham's part, he had obeyed the Lord.

II. Faith strengthened Abraham, we are told, for this wondrous act of obedience. What remains of the text may be understood in two ways; we shall take it in both. He offered "his only-begotten son" says St. Paul, (to take one rendering)

By faith...accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also HE HAD, IN A MANNER, received him.

If faith be confidence in God, it supposes God to have spoken. Here then is ample matter for consideration; God in this instance, had spoken twice, and his words were at variance with each other. He had said to Abraham, five and twenty years before this, "my covenant will I establish with Isaac"...."in Isaac shall thy seed be called."² He now said, "take thy son....Isaac...and offer him for a burnt-offering." Now in which of these words, let us ask, was Abraham believing? to which of them was he looking, when he offered up his son? Was he looking to the latter

¹ Genesis xxii. 3, 6, 9, 10.

² Genesis xvii. 21. xxi. 12.

word, believing that it neutralized the former? This would not have been faith. He might have as well looked to the former, believing that it neutralized the latter, and refused to give up the child. Abraham was looking to neither, but to GOD HIMSELF. The words must have distracted him; it was impossible to reconcile them. But he knew that God would reconcile and bring them both to pass; and holding fast his confidence in him he went on to do his will. This discovers faith to us in its root and essence. It is more than a mere belief of words. We believe the word of God because we rely on the Speaker. If Abraham's faith had been a mere belief of words, in what a condition would he now have been! But his faith (and he is the pattern of faith) was CONFIDENCE IN THE GOD WHO HAD SPOKEN THEM. Confidence in God, implies that we look for something from his hand; and it is this expectation which sustains the heart in trial. What then was Abraham looking for, on this trying occasion? what was the expectation which sustained his heart? May we say that he was looking for the kingdom of heaven and everlasting life, and that these hopes made him willing to surrender Isaac, and every earthly good? The thought is unworthy both of God and of Abraham. Isaac's life was no mere earthly good; he was the Seed from whom the Christ should come, and Abraham's dearest hopes therefore centred in the child. If these hopes had been shipwrecked in Isaac's untimely death, his hope of salvation would have perished with them. May we say then that the patriarch expected that God would interpose at the last, and stay his hand from slaying the child of promise? I cannot believe that the patriarch had such an expectation. It turns his trial into a mere exhibition, to suppose so; making it, in fact, no trial. It is besides contrary to the declaration of the text, which sheds the blessed light of God upon this deeply interesting subject. He "offered up his only-begotten son" says St. Paul, "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." It is plain from these words that he expected him to die. But it is equally plain that his confidence remained unshaken that he who should die on

that morning, should be the father of the promised Seed. And there was only one way, as it appeared to Abraham, in which both these things could happen. He expected therefore, in that way, the manifestation of Divine mercy; he believed that God would raise him from the dead. The thing was indeed, as man would say, impossible; but to Abraham's God, as the patriarch's past experience told him, nothing was impossible. He had already "in a manner," received Isaac from the dead; and the remembrance of this must have reassured him now. Isaac had been the fruit of "his own body," when "as good as dead," and had been presented to him, by the power of God, a living child from the dead womb of Sarah.¹ And he who had made life once to proceed from death, was able to do so again, was able to resuscitate this child of promise from his ashes. But where, it may be asked, was the trial either to grace or to nature, if Abraham thus expected to receive his son again? This is the question of mere thoughtlessness. The victory of grace was being able, in such circumstances, to expect to receive him again. And besides, though grace was victorious in this trial, believing in the salvation of God, had nature nothing to endure, before this salvation could come? Was it no trial for the father, during the long journey from his home to Mount Moriah, to revolve in his mind the painful image of the death of his only son, a death by violence, and inflicted by his own hand? Was it no trial to command his feelings as he said to the servants, "I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you,"² knowing as he did too well, what was to happen in the meantime? Was it no trial to build the altar, to lay the wood in order, to bind Isaac his son, to lay him on the altar, on the wood? Finally, was it no trial to stretch forth his hand, and take the knife to slay him, expecting in another moment to witness his convulsive struggles, and then to look on a heap of ashes as the only remains of his child? So far from being no trial, these things were the crucifixion of nature; for faith, let us remember, took not away their bitterness,

¹ Romans iv. 19. Hebrews xi. 12.² Genesis xxii. 5.

though it strengthened the sufferer to endure them. Nor did the Divine interposition take away that bitterness. It saved Abraham indeed from slaying his son in act, but he had previously endured in spirit all the anguish of doing so; the cup did not pass from him till he was drinking its very dregs. The last words of the text (if the meaning given to them in our version, which is the other rendering, be adopted) shew this in a very striking way. The patriarch had given up his son for dead, for when he received him again, it was a figurative resurrection,—it was receiving him as from his ashes. The joyful surprise of the one reception was as great as that of the other would have been, plainly shewing THE DEEP REALITY of the trial through which the parent had passed.

III. This brings us to the special consideration of the last words of the text. I believe on the whole, (though the point is not material) that our version is correct, and that these words set forth the reward of Abraham's faith rather than its nature. Let us read them therefore as they stand,—

From whence also he received him in a figure.

Faith has its suitable reward when it receives the expected blessing; and that blessing, in the Divine generosity, is always beyond our expectations. It was thus with the patriarch on the present occasion. He expected a living son, a son restored from death: he received a living son, a son virtually restored from death; but he was spared the pain of slaying him. And this was by no means the extent of the Divine generosity: God returns with interest whatever is given to him. Abraham had given him his only son; the gift was returned, and was not returned empty. The same heavenly voice which stayed his hand from slaying him, conveyed the assurance that by what he had done, he had obtained the Divine approbation. Nor was the Lord content with this. He spake from heaven a second time, renewing all his former promises, confirming them also with an oath,

and enlarging them exceedingly. There is something in this scene on Mount Moriah, which renders it more deeply interesting and affecting than perhaps any other circumstance recorded in Old-Testament Scripture. We may well turn aside and see this great sight. Almighty God is bending from the sky, to pour his blessing on his obedient servant's head; language is taxed to its utmost powers of expression, to convey to the object of his regard the fulness of his mercy, and the kind intentions of his gracious benignity; and yet we are conscious, as we read, that language is inadequate to the task; that this mercy, grace, and benignity CANNOT FIND EXPRESSION. Who shall conceive the feelings of Abraham, while thus addressed by Abraham's God! The anguish of the few preceding days, and all the trials of past years, would seem as nothing; I cannot remember them, he would exclaim, for I serve One who values too highly and repays too amply my feeble efforts to please him.¹

But there is a far deeper meaning, I apprehend, in the words, "received him, in a figure," than that which has now been given. Tyndale renders them, "he received him for an ensample;" the Rheims version has, "he received him also for a parable;" and the version of Cranmer, with greater distinctness than either, says that "he received him for an ensample of the resurrection." For the virtual resurrection of Isaac was a shadowing forth of that mercy which has been, in all ages, the hope of the just; nay this whole transaction on Mount Moriah, was a parabolic representation of the mysteries of redeeming love. I believe with these translators, that the apostle meant to direct our attention to this, in the words which we are now considering. And even should this be set aside by the other rendering of the text being adopted, the truth of the figurative character of the transactions of Mount Moriah may be proved from other scriptures. Abraham was in the land of the Philistines when he received the command in question. If God's object then had simply been to put his faith and obedience to a trial, the appointed sacrifice might have taken place where he was

¹ Genesis xxi 12-13.

sojourning. But instead of this, he was enjoined to proceed into Canaan, and to journey onwards in Canaan till he came to a certain locality; and there, he was told, a particular mountain would be pointed out as the scene of sacrifice. These injunctions were no slight addition to the patriarch's trial, for they greatly protracted its anguish; after he had journeyed three days, he "lifted up his eyes," and the place was still "afar off."¹ God therefore must have had a reason for them of the most important kind. Let us consider his dealings with David nine hundred years afterwards; they throw some light on this matter. We read that "the Lord sent pestilence upon Israel," that "there fell of Israel seventy thousand men," and that the destroying angel stayed his hand "by the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite." The angel immediately commanded David to rear up an altar in that threshing-floor; David obeyed, offering burnt-offerings and peace-offerings; and the Lord declaring himself pacified, commanded the angel to put up his sword into the sheath. The king's instant exclamation was, "this is the house of the Lord God, and this is the altar of burnt-offering for Israel." He accordingly made abundant preparation before his death, leaving it in charge to his son Solomon to build the house of God.² And "Solomon began to build...at Jerusalem, in MOUNT MORIAH, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing-floor of Ornan the Jebusite."³ So that the very spot which God indicated to Abraham, as the scene of Isaac's sacrifice, was the spot on which he afterwards declared himself pacified by sacrifice, which he indicated to David as the site of "burnt-offering for Israel," and on which sacrifices were offered till the coming, a thousand years afterwards, of that Lamb of God whom they prefigured. Abraham said to his son, as they ascended that memorable hill, "God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt-offering,"⁴ and God fulfilled these unconsciously prophetic words, when Jesus died, as a sacrifice for sin, without

¹ Genesis xxi. 34. xxii. 1—4.

² I Chronicles xxi. 14—30. xxii. 1—16.

³ II Chronicles iii. 1.

⁴ Genesis xxii. 8.

the gates of Jerusalem,—the same locality, and not far from the same spot. It is impossible to put all these considerations together without coming to the conclusion that God had a special purpose in the command which he now gave to the patriarch. We have already seen that he and his sons came to the land of Canaan, because it was identified in their minds, with the hope of a Saviour to come; and St. Paul has expressly told us in the context, that they looked to it as the theatre of his glories. But they surely knew something also of his humiliation and sacrifice; and if Canaan was identified in their minds, with a Saviour coming to reign, it was surely identified also with a Saviour coming to die. The words of our Lord, "Abraham saw my day," cannot be restricted to the day of glory: their primary reference was to the day which Israel was then despising, i. e. his revelation as the lowly Son of man. And these words have a most striking and beautiful meaning, if it was indeed given to Abraham to discern this blessed mystery in what passed on Mount Moriah. His own paternal feelings would make him understand something of the love of God to man; he would have a glimpse, in the suppressed anguish of Isaac, of the grace of the willing Saviour; in Isaac virtually sacrificed, he would behold that Saviour slain; while in Isaac unbound and descending alive from the altar, he would behold a foreshewing of victory over death, the victory of Jesus and that of his people after him. In this parabolic instruction he would see Messiah's day; and the words of the text, I repeat, seem designed to tell us that he did so. It was an act of needless cruelty, says the infidel, to appoint to the patriarch this trial of obedience, when another would have sufficed as well. But by the view now presented, this objection is completely set aside. For the gladness with which this foreshewing of redemption would fill the heart of Abraham, would more than repay him for all his suffering and anguish, and to the end of his earthly pilgrimage he would return thanks to him whose wisdom and love had appointed such a trial.

THERE was something peculiarly apposite to the circum-

stances of the Hebrews, in this part of the history of their father Abraham. Called as they then were to sacrifice all that was dear to them for Christ's sake, they were reminded that he, when commanded by God to do so, had resigned his son, his only one, his Isaac, his child of promise. Tempted, through the long continuance of persecution, to call in question the faithfulness of God and to think that he had forgotten to be gracious, they were reminded of the dark cloud of mystery in which their sainted father had been enveloped, when God seemed to forget all his promises and to retract in a moment the assurances of fifty years. Tempted to fear, as David did in the days of his affliction, that the rage of their enemies would swallow them up, they were reminded that when Abraham had given up all hope, when there appeared no possibility of the life of Isaac being spared, God had provided for him, at the last moment, a ram instead of his son. The patriarch himself was so affected by this interposition, that he called the place "Jehovah Jireh," i.e. the Lord will provide. And it became, in reference to this transaction, a proverbial saying in Israel, "In the Mount the Lord shall be seen," i.e. in his people's extremity their God will appear.¹ Now the faith, St. Paul would say, which strengthened Abraham to make such a sacrifice, can strengthen you also; and if faith abide and be "found unto praise and honour," the issue of your trial shall be as glorious as was the issue of his. I furnish you therefore with an antidote against despair, Remember JEHOVAH JIREH; in your case, as in Abraham's, the extremity of man is the opportunity of the Lord.

And there are other lessons also, applicable to all ages of the Church, which may be learned from this solemn and mysterious transaction. It teaches us concerning God, concerning faith, concerning the Divine love to us and our duty to God in return.

Its figurative character teaches us concerning God. There was a father who had an only-begotten son, the joy and perpetual comfort of his heart. That son was delivered by

¹ Genesis xxii. 13, 14. Original Text. See Clarke and Henry.

his own hand to death, and was received alive into his paternal arms again. He of whom we speak, as we have already seen, was God; his son was Christ. Our sin "tried" the Almighty, proved the feeling of his heart, the strength of his love to man. And "God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son."¹ But here the type fails; no one interposed to save that Son from suffering, or to spare that Father's heart. Jesus was condemned, buffeted, scourged, spitted on; was led to crucifixion; was killed; was laid in the cold grave. And whilst these things were done, did the Father behold them unmoved? The living and eternal God is "without passions,"² but he is the fountain of tender, gracious, and affectionate feeling. He gave to Abraham his paternal heart; and in what Abraham's feelings must have been when he "took the knife to slay his son," we read what passed through the bosom of the Father of heaven, when he beheld from his throne above, the Cross set up on Calvary. In that solemn and fearful hour (to speak after the manner of men) the Creator seemed to forget his creation. The sun went down at mid-day, the rocks rent, the graves opened, the earth heaved, and all nature forsook her course; for the heart of nature's God was moved within him, the bowels of the Father were troubled for his Son. But this grief over his bruised child³ was transient, for he received him again from the grave. We see this also shadowed forth in Abraham unbinding his living Isaac, and taking him down from the altar of burnt-offering. Who may describe his feelings as he did so! But the father's extatic joy in that moment of blessedness, was only a feeble type of the joy of the Father of Jesus on the morning of the third day. We learn this from the memorable words with which he hailed his beloved One as he came forth from the tomb, "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee."⁴ I can call thee MINE NOW, he said, for I have rescued thee from the grasp of death, and thou shalt not be taken from me any more for ever.

¹ John iii. 16.² Articles I.³ Isaiah liii. 10.⁴ Acts xiii. 33.

The peculiar character of this trial of Abraham, teaches us concerning faith. He had believed words of God before this; but words were now contradictory, nay they were so designedly, that he might confide in God himself. Let us understand then that this is faith. Scripture contains the words of God; but it is not enough to believe that the contents of Scripture are true, we must confide in him from whom they have proceeded. A man may be well-acquainted with the facts and propositions of Scripture; he may be learned in theology, as another is learned in medicine, and another, in astronomy. But such knowledge profits nothing. "When separated from God and His omnipotence" the propositions and demonstrations of theology "become mere syllogisms or emblazonments; they can take their place under the dark shadow of the Atheism of the heart as well as the syllogisms or emblazonments of any other science." This eloquent language is, alas, too true, as the experience of every day attests; the learned theologian, the skilful physician, and the accomplished astronomer are often found equally far from God. How then shall this dark and deadly atheism be cured? By what is written concerning God in his word, when it reveals him to us as a living person; one in whom we can confide, to whom we can surrender our affections, whom we can rejoice to obey. Our fellow-creatures are no abstractions to us; we know our parents, our brothers and sisters, our kindred and friends as living persons; we speak with them, we share their counsels, we confide in their integrity and affection. And God must be no abstraction to us, we must know him in the same manner. It was thus, as we have seen, that Abraham knew him. His understanding was baffled by the apparent contradiction of his words, but he fell back on himself in calm, affectionate confidence, and waited till he explained their meaning.

This subject gives us, besides, encouragement to confide in God; we have the very same evidence of the love of God to us, which God had of Abraham's love to him. He has not withheld his Son, his only Son.¹ This evidence

¹ Genesis xxii. 12. John iii. 16.

satisfied God, and ought to satisfy us; to demand other evidence before we believe, is to refuse to trust the Almighty. And in what a striking light does this exhibit the duty which we owe to God! He did not pass by this proof of Abraham's affection; "Because thou hast done this thing" he said, "surely blessing I will bless thee." We ought not then to pass by this proof of his affection, but should "bless the Lord at all times," and have his praise continually in our mouths. Lives of devotedness should also prove the sincerity of our gratitude; constrained by his goodness we should be found living to his glory, and when doing all, we should still be asking, What shall we render to the Lord? Let us lay this to heart and learn these blessed lessons, lest God's recompense of Abraham be a witness against us in the judgment. Abraham shall testify in that day, that the Lord requited man's love, man's generous sacrifice for His name. And we shall find no refuge in which our guilt may hide itself if our lives have borne melancholy evidence that man requited not the love, the unspeakable gift of God. May He of His infinite mercy, grant that it be otherwise with us!

See Appendix, Note O.

LECTURE XIII.

Hebrews xi. 20.

"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come."

WE have been occupied, for the last four lectures, with the illustrations of faith which are afforded by the history of Abraham and his family. St. Paul now finds another such illustration in the history of the patriarch Isaac.

BY FAITH OF THINGS TO COME, *Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau.*

A more apt illustration could not have been found; a more profitable subject of meditation could not have been brought before us. It discovers in the first place, the true nature of faith: we find the patriarch, on the bed of age and infirmity, foretelling the history of generations, yea of nations then unborn. And it proves, in the second place, the certain accomplishment of every thing in which faith believes: for if we consult history either sacred or profane, we shall find that the event has corresponded exactly with the prediction. Our attention is arrested, in the third place, by the amazing difference between the blessings bestowed on these brothers. And we are led, in the fourth place, to inquire into the reason of this difference. The subject will abundantly recompense our prayerful and attentive regard.

I. We read in the book of Genesis, that when Isaac was old, he sent for his two sons and blessed them. The circumstances connected with this act were very peculiar, but with them we have nothing at present to do; the exclusive

objects of our attention are the blessings themselves. That of Jacob is mentioned first in the text, because it was first in order. "God give thee" said his father Isaac, "of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee." "God Almighty bless thee," he again said, "and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; and give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham."¹ The blessing of Esau comes next in order. "Behold, thy dwelling," said his father, "shall be the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above; and by thy sword shalt thou live, and shalt serve thy brother; and it shall come to pass when thou shalt have the dominion, that thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck."² In pronouncing these words over the heads of his two sons, Isaac declared that they should be the fathers of great, powerful, and warlike nations, and that the countries inhabited by them should be distinguished by fertility and abundance. He declared that the seed of Jacob should be multiplied exceedingly and should inherit Canaan, that they should rule over all the nations round and more especially over the seed of Esau; that they should be the blessed nation, the object of God's peculiar regard. He declared concerning the seed of Esau, that though they should serve the children of Jacob, it should be only for a time; that dominion should one day return to them, and that when that day arrived, they should break from off their necks the hated fraternal yoke. The text tells us that the patriarch declared all this "by faith of things to come." Such faith was indeed, according to the apostle's definition, "the evidence of things not seen." Surely Isaac, from his bed of age and infirmity, did not see the thousands of Israel dwelling in the land of Canaan as the favoured people of the

¹ Genesis xxvii. 26—29. xxviii. 3, 4.² Genesis xxvii. 39, 40.

Lord; did not see the victories of David and the subjugation of the Edomites; did not see the reign of Solomon. Surely he did not see the Edomites dwelling in Mount Seir and living by their swords, neither did he see their successful revolt against Israel. No; but God saw it all, and shewed it to his servant. And Isaac, having faith in God, took the Divine word as his evidence that it should surely come to pass.

II. And it did come to pass. The patriarch exclaimed before blessing Jacob, "See, the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the Lord hath blessed;" and this assurance of the peculiar Divine favour which was to attend him and his, was afterwards, as we have seen, confirmed in the blessing itself. Now we have only to trace the history of Jacob, and of the family and nation which proceeded from him, from the time that these words were pronounced to the present hour, to be convinced of their complete accomplishment. Nothing but the Divine blessing preserved him on his way to Haran, and brought him safe back again, notwithstanding the snares of Laban and the ferocious violence of Esau.¹ Nothing else preserved his family from the vengeance of the Canaanites, when his sons had perfidiously slain the men of Shechem.² Nothing else provided for him and for his house an asylum in Egypt, in the time of the grievous famine; caused them to multiply there into a great nation, and at last brought them up again notwithstanding the wrath of Pharaoh; cast out the Canaanite before them, and settled them in that land of promise. Their settlement there was also a fulfilment of another of the words of Isaac. And while they dwelt there, they were indeed "the seed of the blessed of the Lord,"³ as no people had been before them; neither shall there be any after them. They "were many," being a people, as we have already seen, like "the sand of the sea," like "the dust of the earth," like "the stars of the sky in multitude." And this was but a small thing; they had also God dwelling in the midst of them as their lawgiver, judge, and king; they had his holy

¹ Genesis xxxi. 29. xxxii. xxxiii.

² Genesis xxxiv. 30. xxxv. 5.

³ Isaiah lxxv. 23.

oracle for their guidance in perplexity, they had his mighty arm for their refuge in danger. Nor did even this exhaust their blessing. When the lapse of ages brought about at last the accomplishment of the purposes of God, of them, "as concerning the flesh Christ came;"¹ Jehovah took flesh of Judah's daughter, and revealed himself as "Immanuel, God with us."² They knew him not indeed, and crucified him in their blindness; and for that offence they have been scattered among all the nations of the earth. But the Divine blessing has attended them in their wanderings, and still continues to attend them. For the last two thousand years, though found in every land, they have been preserved a distinct people; yea they are so at this moment, kept in the Divine faithfulness for mercy yet in store.

But the blessing bestowed on Jacob was more special and particular; it spoke of "the dew of heaven," of "the fatness of the earth," and of "plenty of corn and wine." And these words were fulfilled in the fertility of the land of promise, a fertility borne witness to by history both sacred and profane. It spoke also of "people" and "nations" serving Jacob's children; yea, it gave to him, in the persons of his descendants, lordship over his brethren and his mother's sons. And these words were fulfilled when the kingdom of Israel was set up. "Many people and strong nations" bowed down then to the seed of Jacob. David overthrew the Philistines, with the Ammonites, Moabites, and Syrians, and reduced under his royal sway his enemies on every side. The dominion of his son Solomon was a still further fulfilment of them. For "Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river unto the land of the Philistines, and unto the border of Egypt:....he had dominion over all the kings: and he had peace on all sides round about him:....they brought presents, and served him all the days of his life."³ Nor was it aliens only who submitted themselves; Jacob's mother's sons, the children of Esau, were overthrown and reduced into subjection by the victorious arm of David. "He put garrisons in Edom; throughout all Edom put he garrisons, and all they of Edom became David's

¹ Romans ix. 5. ² Isaiah vii. 14. Matthew i. 23. ³ I Kings iv. 34.

servants."¹ And while part of this blessing was thus fulfilled in the subjection of some nations, part of it was fulfilled in the total destruction of others. It pronounced a curse on every one who should curse his seed, and a blessing on those who should bless them. Egypt once blessed them, and God has not forgotten it: Egypt is still a nation, and the days are coming in which the Lord shall say, "Blessed be Egypt my people."² But let us look at the fate of Amalek. Her people fought with Israel in Rephidim, as they came forth from Egypt; and the Lord swore on that day that he would "utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven."³ This purpose was confirmed by his word in the mouth of Balaam. "Amalek was the first of the nations," he said; "but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever."⁴ It was confirmed in the mouth of Moses also. "Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way," was his charge to Israel; "thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it."⁵ It began to be accomplished by Saul who smote Amalek "from Havilah to Shur;"⁶ and it was still further accomplished by David, after whose days the name of Amalek ceases to appear among the nations. Let us look also at the fate of another of Israel's enemies. Babylon was her prison-house, the most cruel, implacable, and relentless of her oppressors. "None shall remain in it," was the Lord's word of recompense, "neither man nor beast,...it shall be desolate for ever."⁷ And this word has been accomplished; Babylon the magnificent, affords now not even a miserable shelter in which the Arab may fold his flock. Her ruins attest at this hour the truth of God, and remind us of the certain fulfilment of every thing in which faith believes; bid us look back four thousand years and remember the words of Isaac, "Cursed be every one that curseth thee."

And the blessing of Esau has had its fulfilment also. It spoke of "the fatness of the earth," and of "the dew of

¹ II Samuel viii. 14. ² Isaiah xix. 25. ³ Exodus xvii. 8—16.

⁴ Numbers xxiv. 20. ⁵ Deuteronomy xxv. 17—19. ⁶ I Samuel xv. 1—7.

⁷ Jeremiah li. 62.

heaven;" and history, both sacred and profane, bears witness to the fertility of the land of Edom. It spoke of the Edomites living by their swords; and all history testifies to the warlike character of that people. But warlike as they were, the yoke was to be upon their necks; they were to serve the seed of Jacob. And it was so, as we have already seen: they were subdued by David, and continued in subjection for nearly two hundred years. At the end of that time they "revolted, and made a king over themselves." Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat, who then reigned in Judah, attempted to reconquer them; but the blessing of Isaac was too powerful for him. The aged patriarch had said to Esau, "It shall come to pass that when thou shalt have the dominion, thou shalt break his yoke from off thy neck." And it did come to pass accordingly. Notwithstanding Jehoram's partial success "Edom," as we are told by the inspired historian, "revolted from under the hand of Judah unto this day."¹ The blessing bestowed on the father of the Edomites, has therefore failed in nothing, but has been in every point fulfilled.

III. Let us next observe the vast, the amazing difference between the blessings bestowed on these brothers. It does not appear at first sight, but a careful comparison reveals it in a most striking way. The name of the God of blessing is not even mentioned in that which was given to Esau. The fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven are promised; ability and strength for war are also promised: but these are not said to come from God, or to be bestowed on the receiver as marks of Divine favour. The blessing is wholly earthly. And being earthly, it is also temporary; it is bounded by the present world, and there is nothing in it which reaches into eternity. How very different is the blessing bestowed on Jacob! To him, as to his brother, the dew of heaven and fatness of the earth are promised, with ability and strength for war; but these mercies are in his case, expressly said to come from God, yea to be the fruit of Divine favour. "God give" them to thee, is the language of the inspired patriarch; for "the smell of my son is as the smell of a field which the

¹ II Kings viii. 20—22.

Lord hath blessed." This appears in a still more striking manner, in the concluding words of the blessing. The Divine denunciation, "Cursed be every one that curseth thee," was a declaration on God's part, of enmity to Jacob's enemies; whilst the precious benediction, "Blessed be he that blesseth thee," declared him the friend of Jacob's friends; for God only can curse, God only is able to bless. He was the friend of Jacob himself then, and the God also. The prophetic words of Isaac, understood in this their obvious import, conveyed thus to Jacob the heirship of Abraham's promises, declaring beforehand the name afterwards announced at the bush, "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."¹ The blessing of Jacob therefore is eminently and essentially spiritual; assuring its object of the favour and love of the Most High. And being spiritual, it is also eternal; he who is possessed of this love and favour, is possessed of eternal life. This point requires no further elucidation; attention has already been drawn to the gracious Divine declaration that "the God of Jacob" is his name FOR EVER. One of these brothers had in this way the creature for his portion, whilst the other had the Lord; one had time, whilst the other had eternity. The reason for this difference in his dealings with them, is explained to us by God himself. "Was not Esau Jacob's brother?" is his question to Israel by Malachi: "yet I loved Jacob, and I hated Esau."² If we seek further proof of this difference, let us trace the history of their descendants, on whom their blessings took effect. The seed of Esau were a great and warlike people, inhabiting a fertile and well-watered country. But so far from knowing or fearing the God of their father Abraham, they sank into heathen darkness, and continued a nation of brutish idolaters, after his worship had been for ages, set up in the land of Israel. Their history is thus a practical illustration of the worldly character of their father's blessing; Abraham's God was not the God of Edom. It is an illustration also of its temporary character: Where is it now? Where is now the

¹ Exodus iii. 6.² Malachi. i. 2, 3.

fatness of Mount Seir, the goodly land of Edom? It is alas, a barren wilderness, a waste of sand. And where are now those valiant Edomites who lived by their swords in the days of their nation's glory, and brake Israel's yoke from off their necks? They are gone from the face of the earth; Edom is no more a nation. Esau's blessing has thus RUN OUT; the last sands of it are numbered. Let us compare with this, the history of the descendants of Jacob. God, as we have already seen, took them as his peculiar people, revealed his name to them, set up his worship in the midst of them, and bestowed on them his living oracles. Of them came patriarchs, saints, and prophets; of them came the Messiah; of them came the twelve apostles, the instructors of mankind. They have also been honoured to present to all nations the blessed word of life: there is not a word of holy Scripture which is not the writing of a Jew. And their blessing is as enduring as it is precious. Many generations have passed since the name of Edom was forgotten; but the name of Israel is still remembered, and shall be to the end of time. He who revealed himself at the bush, declared that "the God of Jacob" was his "memorial to all generations;" and every past generation attests the faithfulness of his word. The present generation attests it also; and future generations shall attest it more abundantly. For the word of the Lord in the mouth of Jeremiah, shall assuredly be yet accomplished: God shall gather Israel again, and plant them in their own land with his whole heart and his whole soul.¹ We have witnessed the accomplishment of the word of St. Paul, for their off-casting has proved "the reconciling of the world;" and we shall as surely witness the accomplishment of the kindred assurance, that the receiving of them again shall be "life from the dead."² They shall be God's ministers of salvation to mankind, and in them and in their seed, while sun and moon endure, "shall all families of the earth be blessed."³ The same blessing which preserves them a distinct people now, shall prevail to do these things for them. And that

¹ Jeremiah xxxii. 41.² Romans xi. 15.³ Genesis xii. 3.

blessing shall never RUN OUT, its sands shall never be numbered.

IV. Let us now inquire into the reason of this difference. Esau was the elder of these two sons of Isaac, and yet the name of Jacob is mentioned first in the text. And this is not by chance; the Apostle would remind us that the younger stepped into the elder's place. Now there must have been a cause for this: God puts down no man from his place without a reason. Sin was the cause of it. The blessing which Jacob obtained, was Esau's birthright, for it was Abraham's blessing and belonged to his elder grandson. And had it not been for that grandson's profane contempt of it, the name at the bush should have been, "the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Esau." St. Paul declares this in express terms. He exhorts the Hebrews, as we shall afterwards see more fully, not to follow the example of that "profane person, Esau, who for one morsel of meat, sold his birthright." He reminds them also that for this offence "he was rejected afterwards, when he would have inherited the blessing"; and that he was not able to turn aside the wrath or alter the purpose of God.¹ And the book of Genesis, in these particulars, entirely confirms the Apostle. It tells us that Esau came faint from his hunting, and begged some pottage from Jacob. Jacob made the birthright the price of the pottage; and Esau, exclaiming with the profaneness of unbelief, "What good shall this birthright do to me?" accepted Jacob's terms, and sold the precious treasure. The time came round, it further tells us, when the brothers should receive their blessings; and God took away the birthright-blessing from him who had thus despised it. What renders this much more striking, is that Isaac was not at the first aware of the Divine purpose, and blessed Jacob, mistaking him for Esau. But he whose inspiration guided his words taught him to acquiesce in his righteous dealing; for when he afterwards blessed Esau, knowing who stood before him, he omitted, and I believe through intention, the very name of God. It really appears as if God had said to

¹ Hebrews xii. 16, 17.

him, Give thy son what he cares for, let him have worldly good, and in abundance; but do not assure him of my favour, do not speak to him of my mercy, do not pledge me to be a God to him, for these things he has cast away. Righteous Abraham's mercy thus alighted on the head of Jacob: he to whom it pertained, had proved unworthy, and it sought another object.¹ Was Jacob then the worthier of the two? His conduct in the matter of the birthright and in afterwards deceiving his father, will not permit us to say so. But God was pleased to meet with him on his way to Haran, to reveal his goodness and to touch his heart. And whatever had been the character of the preceding years of his life, he sought God's face from that hour, and became his devoted servant.² For while unhappy, thoughtless Esau lived and died a worldling, Jacob, as we have already seen, waited for the salvation of God. These things duly considered, account most satisfactorily for the difference of their blessings. The worldling received the worldly and temporary blessing: he whom God afterwards taught to value it, received that which was spiritual and eternal.

THIS reference to the history of their fathers Isaac and Jacob, was fitted to teach the Hebrews some most important lessons. They could not call to mind their own experience as a people, or that of their kindred the Edomites, and connect them with the scene in the family of Isaac to which the apostle here refers, without being convinced of the certain accomplishment of every thing in which faith believes. And to those who, by reason of long-continued trials of faith, were tempted to distrust God, such a lesson was invaluable. They could not call to mind the rejection of Esau, without being convinced that all were not children who were of Abraham; for Esau also was of Abraham. And they were thus warned to take heed, lest though themselves of Abraham, they also should come short of Abraham's blessing. Finally, they knew enough of Esau's history, to be aware that through preference of a present world, he had lost the blessing of the Lord. And tempted as they then were to

¹ Genesis xxv. 29—34. xxvii.² Genesis xxviii. 10—22.

forsake Christ and his salvation, the remembrance of that unhappy worldling must have been a salutary beacon on the one hand, whilst that of their father Jacob furnished them with a pattern on the other.

It is needless to add that these lessons are all for us. Happy indeed is the man whose hope is in the Lord his God! Our breath goes forth, and we return to our earth; but to those who trust in him, he "keepeth truth for ever."¹ It is nearly four thousand years since Isaac returned to his earth, but the words in which he believed, have been fulfilled, and are at this moment receiving their fulfilment. And the experience of the humblest believer in the blessed gospel, is and shall be in all respects the same. Ages may have rolled over the world since he departed from it, his humble tomb may be forgotten, his very name and history may have perished from among men. But he is not forgotten before God; he has rich and blessed experience of the truth of every word in which he was caused to hope during his sojourn here below. For "all flesh is as grass....The grass withereth...but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you."² He who makes that gospel his hope, chooses the blessing of Jacob; he who turns to something else, casts in his lot with Esau. We have already seen that Esau's blessing was worldly: it promised the fatness of the earth and the dew of heaven, but nothing more. Jacob's blessing is better then, even now. "Thou hast put gladness in my heart," says the Psalmist, "more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased."³ We have seen also the temporary character of Esau's blessing; but Jacob's lasts for ever. "There was a certain rich man, who was clothed in purple and fine linen....and there was a certain beggar....laid at his gate." "It came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom;" and so with his death his eternal enjoyments begun. "The rich man also died, and was buried;" and with his death and burial his enjoyments ended. He who had "fared sumptuously

¹ Psalms cxlvi. 4—6.

² I Peter i. 24, 25.

³ Psalms iv. 7.

every day," and the crumbs of whose table had been an object of desire, implored then a drop of water. But he implored it in vain; "Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivest thy good things," was his stern answer from on high.¹ Esau might have had the better blessing, nay it was his, but he sold it for a morsel of meat. And the case is the same still. The fatherly love and forgiving mercy of God in which Jacob's blessing consisted, were sealed as ours in baptism, and shall be ours for ever, unless we sell our part in Christ. Satan would fain have us to sell it, and offers us the world instead. And if we take his offer, we do sell it: for we cannot have both; we "cannot serve God and mammon."² The mercy and grace of the baptismal covenant shall not save us if we do so; the profaneness of Esau was not forgiven, though Esau was of Abraham. The temptation before which he fell, resembles that which is now presented to us; the world at its best estate, is after all, only a morsel of meat. And when he who has had no other portion, awakes in eternity and finds himself surrounded by its awful and enduring realities, "it shall be," in the striking language of the prophet, "as when an hungry man dreameth, and, behold, he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty."³ For we only dream that we have found happiness, when we are living without God. Oh delusive dream! Oh fearful awaking! For when we awake, alas, we shall dream no more. The history of these brothers then impresses on us the counsel of St. Paul; bids us seek those things which are above, "where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God," and set our "affection on things above," and "not on things on the earth."⁴ Following this counsel and looking with Jacob for God's salvation, we shall be privileged, when this world is no more, to behold the Saviour's face in righteousness; yea we shall be satisfied, when we awake, with his likeness.⁵ May God, in his infinite goodness, grant this grace to us all!

¹ Luke xvi. 19—25.² Luke xvi. 13.³ Isaiah xxix. 8.⁴ Colossians iii. 1, 2.⁵ Psalms xvii. 15.

LECTURE XIV.

Hebrews xi. 21, 22.

"By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff. By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones."

THE Apostle has not yet done with the inexhaustible history of those patriarchs whose God the Almighty was not ashamed to be called. Not satisfied with a general reference to Isaac and Jacob in connection with their father Abraham, he referred, as we saw in the last lecture, to the faith of Isaac specially, and in the first of the verses which we have now read, he refers as particularly to the faith of Jacob. With Jacob he associates, in the second verse, the most honoured of his sons; that son who, in reward of righteousness, received the first-born's blessing; the favoured patriarch Joseph. His reference to Isaac, introduced us to that servant of God on the bed of age and infirmity; his present reference to Jacob and Joseph, introduces us to them on the bed of death. It was with these patriarchs, as moralists tell us is the case with mankind in general. "The ruling passion" was "strong in death;" when heart and flesh were failing, faith discovered undecaying energy, they proclaimed God to be the strength of their heart, and declared him to be their portion for ever.¹

As we examine in detail these references to Old-Testament history, we shall find them most instructive. They furnish

¹ Psalms lxxiii. 26.

another example of the true nature of faith, and another proof of the certain accomplishment of everything in which faith believes. And besides this, the former of them shews in a most striking way, what God esteems to be a blessing, and reveals to us at the same time, his sovereignty in his dealings with men. We shall take these points in order.

I. St. Paul tells us that "by faith, Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph." And in conformity with this, we read in the book of Genesis, that Joseph took his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, to visit their dying grandsire, and that Jacob blessed them. He adopted them as his own sons, declaring that like Reuben and Simeon, they should be heads of tribes in Israel; he also associated with him in this act of adoption, his fathers Abraham and Isaac. He pronounced on them besides, the benediction of abundant increase, declaring that they should "grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth," and that it should pass into a proverb, "God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh." But there was a peculiar character attached to this blessing: it was unequal. He "stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head." And he did this by intention, for when admonished of it by his son Joseph, and requested to alter it, he refused, saying of his elder grandson, "He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great, but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations." This language and behaviour on the part of the patriarch, discovers the true nature of faith. His whole family amounted at that time to about an hundred persons, and ages were to intervene before that family could increase into a nation, and that nation could be divided into tribes. Jacob had returned to his native dust long before these things happened; and it is therefore superfluous to remark that he did not see them on his dying bed. But God who sees the end from the beginning, revealed them to his servant; and Jacob believing God, recognized in the youths who knelt before him, the

¹ Genesis xlviii. 1—20.

fathers of "the ten thousands of Ephraim," and of "the thousands of Manasseh."¹

St. Paul also mentions, in the former verse of the text, that the dying patriarch "worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff." We have an account of this circumstance in the book of Genesis. The inspired historian has recorded, that when "the time drew nigh that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph," and solemnly charged him not to bury him in Egypt, but with his fathers in the land of Canaan. The dutiful and believing son at once acceded to the dying father's request. But Jacob was not satisfied: "Swear unto me," he said, "and Joseph sware to him." We come then to the reference of the Apostle. Having received his son's adjuration, "Israel," as our translation renders it, "bowed himself upon the bed's head;" or, as the Septuagint version renders it, "worshipped upon the top of his staff." St. Paul, who always quotes from the Septuagint, has followed it on this occasion also; but this variation between it and our translation of the Hebrew, is a matter of no importance. If aged Israel was able to sit up during this interview, he would lean on his staff for support; if he was lying in bed, he would raise himself on his pillow at the head of it, that he might converse with his son. The point of importance in the Apostle's reference, is that he engaged then in an act of worship, expressive of his faith in God. And this appears in both renderings. For the expression "bowed himself," is strictly equivalent to "worshipped." When king David was dying, his people said, "God make the name of Solomon better than thy name;" and "the king bowed himself upon the bed, and said, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel." * We have already seen that this act of worship on the part of Jacob, was immediately subsequent to the promise and oath of his son to bury him in the land of Canaan. Most men desire to be laid beside their fathers after death: it is inherent in human nature. And hence, in all ages and among all nations, we read of family-sepulchres, from the splendid mausoleum of royalty to the humble burying-place

¹ Deuteronomy xxxiii. 17.

* 1 Kings i. 47, 48.

of the peasant. But it was a very different and much higher feeling which prompted the desire of Jacob to be buried in Canaan. The cave of Machpelah in which he wished his bones to be laid, was no mere family burying-place. Both Ishmael and Esau were of Abraham's family; but we do not read that either they or their children were buried there. A higher character belonged to it: it was the grave of faith, the burying-place of believing men and women. "There," says the dying patriarch, "they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah."¹ St. Paul has told us that these worthies "died in faith;" and we may add, that they were buried in faith. For God had sworn to give that land to their seed for an everlasting possession, and they desired their bones to be laid in it, in testimony that they believed his word. God had also sworn to be Abraham's God for ever, and to bless through him and with his blessing, the whole company of the saved. And those of Abraham's family who believed God's word, desired therefore to lie down beside that father of blessing; it was an expression of their faith that they should rise and inherit with him at last. The mind of Jacob was evidently exercised in this way, when he made the request which we are now considering. If he had merely wished to be buried in the family sepulchre, he would not have used language of such urgency, nor exacted an oath after receiving a solemn promise, nor bowed his head in worship after this assurance had been given. But the view which has just been presented, explains both his urgency and his worship. It was the worship at once of thanksgiving and of faith. He was pouring forth his acknowledgments, as he bowed his head, to him who had put it into the heart of Joseph to comply with his dying wish; he was laying hold afresh of every word of blessing which God had spoken to Abraham, and in connection with the land of promise; he was calling God for a record upon his soul, that in assured expectation of the fulfilment of them all, he yielded up the ghost.

¹ Genesis xlix. 31.

There is one circumstance connected with the death of Jacob, which demonstrates in a most striking manner, the truth of these remarks. He said to Joseph just after blessing his sons, "God shall...bring you again unto the land of your fathers." And faith in God imparted to this expectation in the mind of the patriarch, the distinct character of certain reality; for he added immediately, "I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow." There never certainly was a more singular bequest, if we consider the circumstances of the testator. He had bought the parcel of ground referred to, from Hamor the king of Shechem, and had built on it an altar to the Lord.* And when the Amorite had dispossessed him, most probably after the murder of the Shechemites by his family, he had recovered it by the sword. Joseph had nothing to do with that perfidious murder, and was entitled, as having now the place of the first-born, to a portion above his brethren; and to him therefore it was bequeathed by his dying father. But how was the bequest to take effect? Seventeen years had elapsed since the patriarch had left Canaan; and the original owner had doubtless repossessed himself of the property. Jacob's family were also then multiplying in Egypt, and there was no probability, for ages to come, of their claiming their rights in Canaan. But the mind of the patriarch was not troubled by such difficulties; he bequeathed it to Joseph and his heirs, as if it had been his to give. Nothing but that faith which is "the substance of things hoped for," and "the evidence of things not seen" will for a moment, explain such an act, or redeem it from the imputation of insensate folly. An illustration from Roman history will bring its true character before us. It has often been referred to, as a most singular demonstration of the confidence of that wondrous people in the prowess of their own right arm, that even after the disastrous day of Cannae, when Hannibal was thundering at their gates, the very ground on which the Carthaginian army stood, was sold in the Roman market.

* Genesis xlviii. 21, 22.

2 Genesis xxxiii. 19, 20.

For though the flower of her warriors had fallen in that fatal defeat, though one of her consuls and nearly an hundred of her senators lay dead upon the field, both buyer and seller knew that that ground should be Rome's again. The case which we are now considering is an example of the same confidence; not of confidence in ourselves indeed, but of confidence in the Lord. Jacob dying in Egypt, and far from the land of Canaan, leaves to the family of Joseph a parcel of ground, then in possession of the Canaanite. For God had said that he would bring up his seed from Egypt, and bestow on them that land as their inheritance; and Jacob believed God.

St. Paul's reference to the history of Joseph displays the true nature of faith in an equally striking manner. "By faith Joseph, when he died," he tells us, "made mention of the departing of the children of Israel, and gave commandment concerning his bones." The book of Genesis again confirms the apostle, and explains more particularly to what this faith had reference. "God will surely visit you" he said, "and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." For though Joseph was surrounded with the pomp and glory of Egypt, his heart was where the hearts of his fathers had been; he looked to Canaan, he clave to the promises of Abraham's God. One of his last acts accordingly was that referred to in the text. Following the example of his father Jacob, he "took an oath of the children of Israel saying....ye shall carry up my bones from hence."¹ He was influenced in doing this, doubtless by the same motive. He desired to leave a testimony behind him of his assured expectation of the fulfilment of the words of the Lord, and to call God and man to witness that in that assured expectation he yielded up the ghost. Now it is impossible not to observe in all this the true nature of faith. If at the period of Jacob's death there was little probability, to judge from appearances, that his children would come forth from Egypt and make good their way to Canaan, there was still less at the death of

¹ Genesis 1. 24, 25.

Joseph. They had begun then to multiply into a nation, and Egypt was filled with them; they had become wedded to its soil and attached to it as their country; they had also learned its religion and become contaminated with its idolatries. Every thing had thus conspired to make them forget that they were Abraham's seed, and cease to look for the fulfilment of the promises of God to their fathers. It was not possible for human wisdom to foresee by what combination of circumstances God would sever these bonds, and lead his people forth that they might possess their promised heritage. But God had said that he would do so, and this was enough for Joseph. He took God's word as his evidence of what it was not given to him to see; and left behind him, in token that he did so, the charge and adjuration of the text.

II. Let us now direct our attention to the fulfilment on God's part, of those good words in which these his servants had trusted. We shall begin with the blessing bestowed on the sons of Joseph. Ephraim and Manasseh became, according to that blessing, heads of tribes in Israel. And what makes this fulfilment of God's word more remarkable, is that one circumstance seemed to render that fulfilment impossible. Jacob had twelve sons, and there were to be twelve tribes in Israel. In what way then could Joseph become the father of two tribes without deranging the order and harmony of the chosen nation? Nothing however which God has promised shall prove impossible of accomplishment. By an express ordinance not revealed till the days of Moses, provision was made for the fulfilment of Israel's dying words; for Levi was forbidden to be numbered among the tribes,¹ and room was thus made for the double tribe of Joseph, for Ephraim and for Manasseh. The benediction of singular increase was also accomplished on them, for they did grow into a multitude. And the inequality of this benediction appeared in their history; for while both were great and numerous, Ephraim the younger was the more numerous and the greater of the two. These fulfilments of the word of the

¹ Numbers 1 47—54.

Lord were apparent as early as the days of Moses; even he tells us of "the ten thousands of Ephraim" and of "the thousands of Manasseh."¹ Let us next observe the fulfilment of the promises in reference to Canaan, in which these sainted patriarchs had believed. We have already noticed the difficulties which lay in the way of this fulfilment; the small number of Israel at the period of the death of Jacob, and their entanglement with Egyptian idolatries before the death of Joseph. But God knew how to remove these difficulties and to burst these bonds. Israel, before Joseph's death, had begun to multiply into a nation; and very soon after that event he raised up a new king over Egypt, and permitted him and his people to oppress and afflict them exceedingly. Egyptian cruelty thus made that land bitter in which they were too ready to have found a home, and was at the same time, God's rod of chastening to them for having served Egyptian idols. This severe discipline moreover was continued, till in their extremity they sought the God of their fathers. And when they sought him, he was entreated of them. "Their cry came up unto God;" He "remembered his covenant," and came down to deliver them.² Moses and Aaron were his selected instruments; and after Egypt had been nearly destroyed by their ministry of vengeance, Israel was brought out of it with an high hand. And he who had begun, went on to remember his covenant. He guided them through the wilderness by his miraculous presence, feeding them with manna for forty years; he cast out the Canaanite before them, and divided among their tribes that goodly land of promise. In the believing foresight of these things, Joseph, as we have seen already, had given charge concerning his bones. And that charge was not forgotten. On that memorable night in which "the hosts of the Lord went out from the land of Egypt," "Moses took the bones of Joseph with him."³ And let us not stop here; if we desire to see the certain accomplishment of every thing in which faith believes, let us follow these hallowed

¹ Deuteronomy xxxiii. 17.² Exodus ii. 23—25. iii. 1—6.³ Exodus xii. 41. xiii. 19.

bones to their final resting-place. They were preserved by the pious care of Moses for forty years in the wilderness, and when Joshua had put Israel in possession of the promised land, they were buried "in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem...and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph."¹ This was the parcel of ground of which mention has been made already, which Jacob bought originally from the Amorite; of which, when unjustly deprived of it, he repossessed himself by his sword and bow; which he bequeathed to Joseph and his family, on his dying bed. Let us give glory to God then for his faithfulness; let us observe how entirely he justifies the confidence which is reposed on him. That day did come for which dying Jacob had looked; Canaan was given to his seed for their inheritance; THAT VERY PARCEL OF GROUND BECAME THE INHERITANCE OF THE CHILDREN OF JOSEPH; IN THAT VERY PARCEL OF GROUND JOSEPH'S BONES WERE BURIED. Let us not be afraid then to confide in the tried truth of God. Nothing which proceeds out of his mouth, be it great or small, ever fails of accomplishment; all comes to pass.

III. We learn also from this subject what God esteems to be a blessing. Jacob is said in the text to have blessed the sons of Joseph; and the chief element in this blessing, as we have seen already, was their adoption into his family. But whether adoption is or is not a blessing, depends on the circumstances of the case. If a rich man is pleased to adopt the son of a poor man to share the fortunes of his children, we esteem it to be so; but we should account it no blessing to the son of a rich man to be adopted into the family and to share the fortunes of the poor. This however was the case on the occasion referred to in the text. The father of Manasseh and Ephraim was lord of Egypt, and only Pharaoh in the throne was greater than he. As far therefore as wealth and rank were concerned, his sons could not have occupied a more exalted position, unless they had been sons to the king. Their grandfather was in comparison, a poor man,

¹ Joshua xxiv. 32.

possessed of neither rank nor greatness; and his sons had no higher place in Egypt than that of Pharaoh's herdsmen! And yet when Jacob transplanted them from the family of their honoured and wealthy father, adopting them into his own ignoble house, and giving them rank with Reuben and Simeon, St. Paul says that he blessed them. It remains a question whether the youths themselves were of this mind. If they valued themselves on being the sons of Joseph, and desired to forget their Hebrew extraction and to acquire Egyptian honours, they certainly would not esteem the patriarch's act a blessing. For the very name of Hebrew was held in abomination in Egypt;¹ and in as far therefore as that act took effect during their lifetime, it would bar their way to coveted distinction and glory. But perhaps they were of one mind with their godly father, and were turning their eyes from Egyptian grandeur to the promises of the God of Abraham. They would esteem, in that case, anything to be a blessing which brought them, at whatever worldly sacrifice, even one step nearer to the heirship of these promises; and would know how to prize the privilege conferred on them, when they were adopted as the sons of Jacob. And whatever was their mind, we see the mind of God.

IV. We learn yet another lesson from this subject: the inequality of their blessings demonstrates the sovereignty of God. I enter on the consideration of this truth with the more willingness, because of all the doctrines of our holy faith it has been the most misrepresented and abused. Some theologians really speak as if the Divine sovereignty were the privilege of doing evil to men without a cause, and of destroying them by an arbitrary decree. Scripture represents it simply as the right of the Sovereign of the universe to distribute his favours as he will, and places side by side with it, that eternal justice which forbids him to bring evil on any, except as the reward of their sin. His dealings with Abraham and his immediate descendants, are a most signal demonstration of these eternal principles of his government.

¹ Genesis xliii. 32.

Let us look at his dealings with Ishmael and Isaac in the family of Abraham, and with Esau and Jacob in the family of Isaac; let us look also at his dealing in the case before us, with Manasseh and Ephraim in the family of Joseph. No offence is charged against Manasseh, nor is any reason assigned why his younger brother was promoted over his head. God was pleased, in sovereignty, to distribute his favours as he did. Neither Manasseh nor Ephraim had any claim on him; and when there is no claim, there can be no complaint. But let it be most carefully observed that both these brothers were blessed; Manasseh received indeed the smaller blessing, but still it was a blessing. The same remark is applicable to the case of Ishmael. When God appeared to Abraham and foretold the birth of Isaac, the patriarch entreated that Ishmael the son whom he already had, might rather live before him. The request was denied indeed, but let us observe the terms of the denial. "As for Ishmael," said the Lord, "I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly...but my covenant will I establish with Isaac."¹ Here are two distinct blessings, a larger and a smaller; and the larger blessing is bestowed on the younger son. It was so, because God is a Sovereign and distributes his favours as he will: neither Ishmael nor Isaac had any claim on his bounty; and when no claim can be advanced, no complaint can be justly preferred. The case of Esau is an illustration of the other principle, and differs essentially from those which we have just considered. The birthright-blessing belonged to Esau, as the elder son of him in whom the seed was to be called, and he could not have lost it without wilful sin. And though for his father's sake, he received worldly good from God's hand, it was unaccompanied by any blessing, he was rejected and cursed. The Divine declaration concerning him, is of the most awful character, "Esau have I hated." These words alone fully demonstrate the truth of the remark which has just been made; for God nowhere declares that he hated either Manasseh or Ishmael.

¹ Genesis xvii. 20, 21.

They received a smaller blessing; but Esau the seller of his birthright, received a positive curse. God gave to them, in sovereignty, the portion which seemed good in his eyes; but he rejected, in awful righteousness, the man who had rejected him, and has left his name and history as a beacon for all generations.

The dealings of God both in providence and grace, confirm these views of his character. If we open our eyes and look around, we cannot fail to observe how unequally, as it appears to us, he has distributed his mercies. Let us look at the difference among nations. The inhabitants of one country enjoy the blessings of civilization and liberty; the inhabitants of another are born, live, and die in miserable barbarism and slavery. Or let us narrow our circle of observation and look at the difference among ourselves. One is born to opulence and ease, another to poverty and toil; one is blessed with health, with a family, and with friends, another spends his life without any of these comforts to cheer it. Let us look at the still greater difference in men's religious condition, and in their opportunities of spiritual improvement. One is born in a land of gospel-light and ordinances; another is born, lives, and dies in a land of heathen darkness. And even among ourselves in this land of Christian light and knowledge, one is the child of parents who teach him early to fear the Lord; another never hears the voice of parental instruction, nor has any example of righteousness or truth set before him. We can ascribe these manifold and obvious differences in men's lot, to nothing but the sovereign pleasure of God. All have received something from his gracious hand; but it requires no proof that all have not received the same. But though God is thus sovereign in his dealings, he still remembers righteousness. Where he has given much, we are assured by the Saviour, that he will ask the more; and while the servant who knew not his Lord's will, shall be beaten with few stripes for neglecting it, he who knew it and did it not, shall be beaten with many.¹ We are not yet arrived however,

¹ Luke xii. 47, 48.

at the depth of this mighty subject. Among those who are privileged with the same opportunities of spiritual improvement, one is allowed to run on in sin till it destroys him eternally; another is arrested by the grace of God and has his feet turned into the path of life. The opportunities of Esau were equal to those of Jacob; Judas Iscariot possessed means of religious knowledge far superior to those of persecuting Saul. The grace which touched the heart of Jacob on his way to Haran, could have stayed his unhappy brother from the profane act which ruined him. And the mercy which arrested the persecutor on his way to Damascus, could have arrested the miserable traitor, ere he had completed his accursed act. Shall we ask the Almighty why he did not do so? "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I WILL HAVE MERCY,"¹ is the answer of his awful oracle; and woe to the creature who dares to pry into what the Creator keeps concealed. We are constrained to acknowledge the righteousness, and to adore the sovereignty of God. The sins of Esau and of Judas were their own; they deliberately preferred the world to God, its gains to his eternal favour; and perdition was their deserved doom. But the salvation of the others was not deserved; God was made manifest to them that asked not after him. "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not,"² was the exclamation of astonished Jacob: "I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long-suffering,"³ is the kindred declaration of St. Paul.

Let us now hear the conclusion of the whole matter. There is no decree registered in heaven's eternal statute-book, against any thing but sin; or against any man, except as the wages of sin. Our final experience cannot resemble that of Esau, unless we follow Esau's steps. And if it now resemble that of Manasseh, if we can point to many whose privileges, opportunities, and advantages are far superior to ours, let us remember that the sovereign God is also the God of judgment, and that more is not expected from us than according to what has been bestowed.

¹ Romans ix. 15.² Genesis xxviii. 16.³ I Timothy i. 16.

But we have all received enough to lead us, if rightly improved, to God and eternal salvation. For we have been privileged with the blessed gospel which tells us of the love of God, of his mercy in passing by our transgressions, and of the kingdom of glory which he has prepared for them that love him. And if we believe his word, put our trust in his grace, and set our hearts on his glorious promises, we are choosing that good part which shall never be taken from us. We are reminded of all this, as the Hebrews were reminded, by the subject which we have just considered. In Jacob and Joseph, as formerly in Isaac, we behold that faith which looks at the things not seen, and believes them without hesitation, on the authority of God's word. And in the accomplishment, even to the minutest circumstance, of every thing which these patriarchs expected, we behold the faithfulness and truth of him on whose word they relied. Let us be encouraged then to follow their example, that we may inherit their blessedness both in this world and in the world to come. We are instructed also by this subject, in the true nature of blessedness. When the world goes well with us, when wealth, honour, and dignity are our portion, and prosperity attends us on the right hand and on the left, we esteem ourselves blessed. But when God tries us with the opposite, suffering our reputation to be spoiled, depriving us of health, of children, and of friends, and visiting us with adversity on adversity, we are apt to think that his blessing has departed. Perhaps however, as in the case of Manasseh and Ephraim, that which bars our worldly advancement and interferes with our worldly comfort, may be a blessing in disguise. What! exclaims the carnal-minded, Can loss of property be a blessing? It may: "Let the rich rejoice in that he is made low,"¹ is the counsel of inspired wisdom. The carnal-minded asks again, Can affliction and tribulation be a blessing? They may: "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth...If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons"² If such visitations wean our affections from a present world and teach us to fix them on

¹ James i. 9, 10.² Hebrews xii. 6, 7.

the world to come, and to find our joy and consolation in the holy service of God, we shall yet look back on them as blessings, yea as the choicest blessings which we have ever received from his hand. The prosperous man therefore is not always the blessed man. He alone is truly blessed, whatever may be the character of God's present dealings with him, who is prepared by grace, through the discipline of providence here, for the kingdom of glory hereafter. May God grant, in his infinite goodness, that such experience be ours !

See Appendix, Note P.

LECTURE XV.

Hebrews xi. 23—26.

“ By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment. By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.”

Most admirable wisdom is displayed by the writer of this epistle, in that part of it which we are now considering. He is addressing Hebrews, and his purpose is to set before them, the excellency and power of faith. After referring therefore to some of those just men whose names and noble deeds were written in their own Scriptures, he goes on to bring before them the illustrious among their ancestors, and to shew that they were all actuated by this noble principle. He then reminds them of every national event in which they gloried, of every national achievement of which they boasted, of the sufferings for God and righteousness of those who had made their national name immortal, and shews that faith was the spring and cause of all. The slightest attention to the structure of this eleventh chapter, especially from the eighth verse to the end, will prove the truth of these remarks. St. Paul, as we have already seen, having referred to Abel, Enoch, and Noah, proceeds, in that part of the chapter, to

references which are peculiarly Hebrew. He begins with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the fathers of the Jewish people. He then refers to Joseph, the man among the twelve patriarchs whom Israel most revered, as the saviour of their infant nation. Following the stream of Jewish history, he refers in the next place, as we shall see in the present lecture, to Moses their deliverer, shewing them that his preservation when a child, and his espousing their cause when come to years were equally the results of faith. This leads him, as we shall see in subsequent lectures, to speak of the preservation of Israel on the night when Egypt was smitten, of their coming forth from Egypt in spite of the wrath of Pharaoh, of their passing through the Red Sea as by dry land, of their overthrowing the Canaanite and taking possession of the promised heritage: and these things he shews to have been the results of faith, in Moses, in Joshua, and in the people whom they led. He speaks next, in the natural progress of his discourse, of the feats of arms done by their warlike fathers in the days of Israel's glory; and finally, of the sufferings for God and righteousness which were endured in the days of her declension, when persecuting kings sat on the throne and shed the blood of saints and prophets. And what gave strength to act thus, and strength to suffer thus, was still, he shews, the same principle, confidence in God.

These were hallowed recollections for a Jew; he could not listen to a discourse which called them up without his very heart being stirred within him. Was it faith, he would ask, which made our father Abraham and our deliverer Moses the men they were?—was it faith which delivered us from Egypt and turned the sea for us into dry ground?—was it faith which overthrew the Canaanite before Joshua, and the enemies of the Lord on every side, before the arm of David? Was it faith, he would again ask, which enabled Sampson to rend the lion, and brought the brethren of Daniel unharmed out of the midst of the furnace, and made Elijah, driven from the dwellings of men, to welcome the sheep-skin for his covering, the cave and mountain-side for his abode?

Whatever I lack then, would be his conclusion, let not faith be lacking. Let me forget present sufferings, and think only of following the sainted footsteps of those who have gone before me; being Abraham's child, let me do the works of Abraham. Such would be the natural effect of this discourse on the mind of a believing Jew. No Gentile is capable, of appreciating its true eloquence and overwhelming power.

I have thus given in few words, a view of the contents of this chapter, because I have ever found that when the scope of any apostolic discourse is apprehended, the particular parts of it are more easily understood. Let us now however direct our attention to the subject suggested by the text. It exhibits faith at once in its true nature, and in its genuine results. They are both seen, first, in the preservation of Moses, when a child, from destruction; and second, in the same Moses, when come to years, renouncing the world and casting in his lot with God's afflicted people.

By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.

We read in the book of Exodus, that in process of time, the patriarch Joseph "died, and all his brethren, and all that generation." There arose then a new king over Egypt, who exceedingly afflicted the children of Israel. But notwithstanding the employment against them of every means which malice could suggest, they so increased and multiplied that the tyrant was alarmed. And he issued in consequence, the edict referred to in the text, commanding all the males among their little ones to be cast into the river. In these days of oppression and extremity, as Scripture proceeds to say, "there went a man of the house of Levi, and took to wife a daughter of Levi, and the woman....bare a son." That little one was Moses. His parents were aware of the king's commandment, that it doomed their child to destruction, and that they put their own lives in peril in attempting

to preserve his. But fearless of that commandment and leaving consequences with God, they hid him "three months."

The text teaches us to regard this behaviour as the result of faith; they acted thus, St. Paul says, "because they saw he was a proper child." We are not to understand from this language, merely that the child was fair; faith would not have recognized that circumstance as a reason for endeavouring to preserve him. St. Stephen tells us that he was "fair to God," i.e. divinely fair. His infantine beauty seems to have had a Divine character impressed upon it, marking him as God's child, as one whom God designed to do some singular work for him on the earth. Such beauty was doubtless to the parents of Moses, a prophetic intimation of their infant's glorious career; and this accounts also, let me observe, for his early presentiment that the deliverance of Israel should be by his hand.¹ It also explains in the most satisfactory manner, the words which we are now considering. Believing that God would preserve a life so precious, the parents of this goodly child willingly put their own lives in peril, to be the instruments of that preservation. For the king's commandment was urgent, and the hiding of their child must have been a matter of the greatest difficulty. And as his mother watched near the place of his concealment, and stole away, when unobserved, to nurse him, she must have passed many a miserably anxious day and many a sleepless night. But confidence in God sustained her and her husband through it all. And when they were not able, with all their contrivances, to conceal him longer, they made "an ark of bulrushes," and confiding doubtless in the same gracious protection, "put the child therein, and laid it in the flags by the river's brink."

Such was their faith and such also were its results; let us just glance, in conclusion, at its reward. Having laid her infant in his watery cradle, in the immediate neighbourhood of the savage crocodile, and exposed to the prying eye of the more savage Egyptian murderer, the believing mother

¹ Acts vii 20; original. 25.

returned home, most probably to solitude and to prayer. His sister however remained behind, to watch over the fate of her brother. That fate was, to all human appearance, soon decided; the daughter of Israel's enemy and destroyer came down to the river's side and found him. But out of apparent destruction God often causes salvation to arise: that circumstance preserved his life. The edict which doomed the helpless infants to destruction, was no woman's decree; the babe wept, and the princess had compassion. She sent his sister to call a Hebrew nurse, and she returned with the child's mother. Nor was the mother kept long in anxiety; "take this child away, and nurse it for me," said the Egyptian, "and I will give thee thy wages." Oh what must have been her feelings as she obeyed this command, as she "took the child" from the hand of Pharaoh's daughter! For it is not only that she was assured of his safety, he had been saved by the daughter of the destroyer, and from the family of that destroyer she was now to receive wages for nursing him! Let us behold in all this, the reward of faith, the reward of believing God instead of fearing man.¹

Satan finding himself foiled in his attempt on the life of Moses, proceeded to work in another way. The preserved infant was surrounded, as he grew to years, with the temptations of luxury, wealth, and rank; he was instructed in all the wisdom of Egypt and qualified to fill the highest office in her state; nay, as the adopted son of an Egyptian princess, he might have hoped to sit, one day, on Egypt's throne. The tempter thus endeavoured to turn God's good to evil, to make the very mercy which had provided for Moses an asylum from destruction, the means of turning him from the cause of righteousness and truth. And here it is well to remark that in this his singular history he was made strikingly like his Lord. For Satan sought first to slay Jesus with the sword of Herod; and when foiled in this attempt by the Father's watchful providence, he displayed all the kingdoms of the world before him, with the offer of immediate possession, if he would consent to be his servant.

¹ Exodus ii 1—10.

It is ever thus with that restless enemy; if malice fail, he has recourse to seduction. But Moses, in this also like his Lord, was proof against the seducer. He had owed his life, when an infant, to the faith of others, and he exemplified, as a man, the power of the same principle in himself. The text proceeds,—

By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

We are not told that this was always the mind of Moses. The words before us seem rather to imply that in the days of thoughtless youth, he was dazzled and intoxicated by the brilliant prospects of worldly distinction and greatness, which his connection with the royal family of Egypt opened for him. Other feelings might also mingle, other considerations might be suggested. You may be God's servant, it might be said to him, and yet be advanced in Egypt; for Joseph was God's servant, and yet only Pharaoh in the throne was greater than he. Think but for a moment of the blessing which you may prove. Is your heart set upon your poor brethren? You may be the means of lightening their bondage. Or do you desire to see the name of the God of Abraham glorified? You may be the means, in time, of recommending it to this great and mighty nation. And think of the wonderful providence which brought you into Pharaoh's house, and made you what you are; he gave these advantages that they might be used in his service, not that they might be thoughtlessly cast away. But whatever effect these worldly prospects and carnal suggestions once had on the mind of Moses, their influence ceased "when he was come to years." Reason then assumed her seat, and under the guidance of the Spirit of grace, taught him to weigh them in wisdom's balances. He learned the comparative

value of this world and the next; he learned to prefer to earthly glory the recompense of God's reward. He learned also that his sacred cause could not be served by dishonorable concealment, and that he would not bless carnal policy for the accomplishment of his gracious designs. The course of Moses was now soon decided; he "refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter." This step was indeed a death-blow to all his hopes on earth; but he did not hesitate on that account to take it. And it was not taken in the days of intemperate youth, under the impulse of excitement and enthusiasm, but "when he was come to years." It was the fruit therefore of the solid judgment and calm deliberation of the matured man.

Moses, in acting thus, had two things to choose between; and greater opposites can scarcely be conceived. There were "the pleasures of sin" and "the treasures in Egypt" on the one hand; for by allowing himself to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, he had the prospect of a life of princely wealth and magnificence at the court of the first monarch on earth. There was "affliction with the people of God," and "the reproach of Christ" on the other hand; for by confessing himself an Hebrew, he could look forward to nothing else. The people of God were then Pharaoh's bondmen. Their lives were made bitter by the most rigorous and galling service, and they had their full share of that contempt and ignominy which is inseparable from the lot of the slave. They had also a peculiar source of suffering, not the reproach of ordinary slavery, but "the reproach of Christ," i.e. of the chosen people of the one true God. Idolatrous Egypt hated them because they bore his name. Nor was Egypt unacquainted with his promise that Abraham's seed should yet be masters of all the earth; it was fear of the fulfilment of that promise which seems to have first suggested to Pharaoh the thought of bringing them into bondage.¹ But now that they were in bondage, this promise was turned to their reproach. The cruel task-master, as he urged them with his whip, would remind them with bitter taunts, of the high

¹ Exodus i. 9, 10.

hopes of their nation, and ask them, in tones of insolent derision, Where was now their God? Moses had to choose then whether he would bask in the sunshine of royal favour, or by confessing himself a son of Abraham, share with Abraham's persecuted family in this cruel affliction and reproach. And he made his choice, as we have seen; preferring Christ to the world.

With respect to this choice, be it also further observed, that it was not between the world and Christ merely; it was between the world at its very best, and Christ at his very worst. For while Egypt laid her honours at his feet, Christ offered no worldly recompense save affliction, reproach, and shame. And he preferred, not the happiness of serving Christ, but this reproach and affliction for his sake to all that Egypt could offer; he took his *bitter* in preference to the world's *sweet*.

But why could not Moses, like Joseph before him, have accepted with a good conscience, Egypt's offered wealth and honours? One word in the text is our answer; Egypt's pleasures were those "of sin." The court and nation were sunk in the most debasing idolatry and in the vices which idolatry sanctions; and Moses could not have accepted what they offered, without conniving at and taking part in their iniquities. It was quite otherwise with Joseph. Egypt regarded him as her benefactor, and his religion was therefore forgiven. But what was forgiven to him would not have been forgiven to Moses. Joseph dwelt in Egypt as an acknowledged Hebrew, and an acknowledged worshipper of the God of the Hebrews;¹ but the courtly favour which Moses enjoyed, depended on his being recognized as an adopted Egyptian, "the son of Pharaoh's daughter." To have secured to himself therefore the continuance of that favour, he must have forgotten that he was of Abraham, he must have denied Abraham's God. But Moses loved the God of his fathers too well, and valued his Hebrew birth-right too highly, to consent for a moment to such terms. His spirit also, like that of St. Paul at Athens, was doubtless

¹ Genesis xli. 12.; xlii. 18.; xliii. 23, 32.

stirred within him, when he saw the brutal debasement of a mighty nation, from the monarch on the throne to the servant behind the mill. And as that nation, in her enmity to the one true Object of worship, went on to persecute and afflict his people, Moses could keep silence no longer; impelled by holy zeal he proclaimed himself a son of Abraham, and a worshipper of Abraham's God. This zeal was inspired by love, as the poet so sweetly sings;—

“If on my face, for thy dear name,
Shame and reproaches be,
All hail reproach and welcome shame,
So thou remember me.”

Thus Moses felt, and his conduct was the result of this feeling.

The text, in conformity with this, ascribes his conduct to faith; for faith, be it ever remembered, is the root and source of love. He did not esteem reproach and affliction to be better in themselves than ease and honour; it is not in human nature to think so, and the Saviour himself was not of such a mind. But faith sees “him who is invisible;” and this faith enabled Moses to apprehend something of the grace and goodness of God. Affliction for his sake and with his people, appeared therefore better in his eyes than opulence and distinction obtained by denying him. The same faith told him moreover that God would reward such behaviour, and “he had respect to the recompense of” this “reward.” The pleasures of sin were temporary; faith told him that this recompense was eternal: the treasures in Egypt availed for this world only; faith told him that a day was coming when one pang endured for Christ should make the sufferer rich for ever. The love of God flowing thus into the heart by faith, expelled the love of the world; and expectation from God prevailed to lift the mind above the seductions of pomp and magnificence surrounding him on every side.

Before taking leave of the history of this man of God, let us just glance for a moment, at the reward which his

faith received. In his merciful dealings with his people God never falls within, but always exceeds their expectations. Moses, in making the sacrifices which he did, expected to be recompensed in this world, by being used of God in the work of delivering Israel.¹ And we have seen already that in relinquishing sin's temporary pleasures, he looked for an eternal recompense. It is superfluous to say that these expectations were realized; they have been exceeded an hundred fold. The time came round when in fulfilment of God's purpose, Moses was sent into Egypt to bring forth his people. He was then distinguished as no servant of God had been before him, neither shall there be any after him. When Pharaoh refused to let them go, it was given to him to shew such signs and wonders before that monarch and before all his servants, as had not been in Egypt since it became a nation. It was given to him also to lead Israel out of it, to guide them for forty years in the wilderness, and to conduct them to the borders of the promised land. Nor was this all. It was given to him to set in order God's holy worship; and the Most High revealed himself to him "face to face, as a man speaketh to his friend." He was also the mediator between God and Israel, the most eminent of the types of Messiah. And these honours were his recompense in this world merely; if we would see the reward of faith, we must follow him into the world to come. There are two intimations concerning him in New-Testament Scripture. He "appeared in glory," in company with Elias; and they talked with Jesus, when he was transfigured on the Mount.² And one of the three disciples who saw him on that memorable occasion, mentions his name again in connection with the visions of the kingdom. The victors over the beast, he tells us, who "stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God,...sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb."³ We may judge from these intimations, of the nearness of Moses to his Saviour, and of the place which he occupies in the heavenly world. For surely it is not a light thing that

¹ Acts vii. 23—25.² Luke ix. 28—36.³ Revelation xv. 1—4.

"the harps of God" should be tuned to sing his song, and that his name should be written beside that of "the everlasting Son of the Father." These honours moreover are everlasting. And thus he who looked for the recompense of God's reward, did obtain and is obtaining it; yea, and he shall obtain it.

THIS referencé to the early preservation and future history of their deliverer, was peculiarly suitable to the circumstances in which the Hebrews were then placed. Their brethren after the flesh had vowed their destruction and were thirsting to shed their blood: Let not this appear a strange thing, the Apostle would say; this deadly hatred to the Church and people of God, has marked the world from the beginning; look back on the early history of our nation and remember the bloody edict of the Egyptian king. And faith, he would add, finds God a refuge and defence in the most evil circumstances and in the darkest hour; look at the example set before you by the parents of Moses, "they were not afraid of the king's commandment;" they prevailed, in spite of it, to save their child. Be not ye afraid then of the persecuting Sanhedrim and of the cruel Gentile governors; the violence of Pharaoh was not able to exterminate the seed of Jacob, and their violence, directed now against the seed of promise, shall prove equally powerless in its turn. Does God call on you, to surrender for his sake, your worldly advantages and comforts? Look at the example of Moses: he surrendered them of his own accord. Is God now forcing on you in his providence, the alternative of sin or suffering; of respite, ease, and comfort by denying him on the one hand, or affliction with his people and the reproach of Christ on the other? Remember the example of Moses: he took the bitter potion prepared by the hand of Christ, and drank it for his sake; he refused the honeyed cup which a smiling world had to offer. And if you would follow this bright example, follow the faith which led to it; have respect, with Moses, to the recompense of God's reward.

These lessons are for us also. This Scripture teaches us, when in the path of duty, to have faith in God and fear

nothing; it tells us that we shall be left for ever without excuse, if we prefer the world and its fleeting interests to his salvation and eternal promises.

That bloody edict which commanded every Egyptian subject¹ to cast the infants of the Hebrews into the Nile, exposed without doubt, to peril, yea probably to certain death, those who should be found concealing them. But the parents of Moses knew that they did the will of God in concealing him, and therefore braved the danger. God seemed for a while, to leave them to the consequences of their act; for when they exposed their infant in his ark of bulrushes, detection appeared certain and unavoidable. But let us see "the end of the Lord"² before we judge him: he warded off that danger, turning it, as we have seen, into the very means of safety; he both protected and rewarded her who had perilled her life to save her infant for his service. And if we had seen her on the evening of that memorable day, as she folded that infant to the bosom of maternal love, she would surely have sought to impress on us as the lesson of her experience, "Who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?"³

We have seen also the choice which Moses made when come to years; he did not hesitate between the world and Christ. Are we indeed of opinion that this was the choice of wisdom? He has once visited this earth since he left it, for he "appeared in glory," as we have already seen, when Jesus was transfigured on the Mount. Let us suppose that the disciples had said to him on that memorable occasion, You once had hopes of the throne of Egypt, tell us, if you regret now that you sacrificed these hopes for Christ? What answer would Moses have returned? We start at the question: it is blasphemy, we say, to compare the throne of Egypt to the glory of God. Let us rather shew however that this is indeed our judgment, by following the example of Moses. And oh how inexcusable does that example leave us, if we decline to follow it! For the circumstances of the vast majority of gospel-hearers differ in two important respects

¹ Exodus i. 22.

² James v. 11.

³ I Peter iii. 13.

from those of Moses; and in both, they have the advantage over him. When he was tempted to forsake his Redeemer, it was by the world in its very best estate. Distinction and glory were proposed to him; a crown and sceptre appeared in the distance. How very few are there to whom the world makes such offers as these! To the great majority she offers, in comparison, a very moderate portion; and with all the activity and diligence which men employ, that portion remains moderate still. Again, when the world sought to tempt Moses from his Saviour's side, Christ was surrounded with every thing calculated to repel from his service; affliction, reproach, and shame were the recompense of cleaving to him. But now, in the good providence of God, this is no longer the case, at least in this favoured land. We may serve Christ without being afflicted for it; the ungodly may hate and revile, but it is beyond their power to harm us. Our choice does not lie therefore between the opposites proposed to Moses. Christ sets before us on the one hand, the incomparable sweetness of his blessed service, unalloyed by any bitterness. And the world sets before us on the other, her very moderate portion, mixed too and alloyed with vexation, anxiety, and care. In making, in his circumstances, the choice which he did, Moses shewed that he was of one mind with his Saviour; that in his judgment it profited a man nothing to gain "the whole world, and lose his own soul." By making in our circumstances the opposite choice, we shew that we are of a very different mind; that in our judgment it may profit a man much to neglect eternal salvation, if he gain but a little of the world. "What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?"¹ is the solemn question of the Lord Jesus. There is nothing so momentary, so trifling, so vile as not to be a worthy exchange for it, is the answer of the conduct of multitudes. The behaviour of Moses was the result of faith; and men act in the fearful manner now referred to, because they have no faith. They do not look for the recompense of God's reward; his redeeming love and everlasting promises are the mere articles of a

¹ Matthew xvi. 26.

creed; they are not present to the mind as certainties, as real things. God forbid, that this should be the case with us! May He be pleased to reveal His glory in our hearts as He did in the heart of Moses, and to grant us the fellowship of his faith! Then shall we follow his sainted steps in this life, and be recompensed with him in the blessed life to come.

LECTURE XVI.

Hebrews xi. 28.

“Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the first-born, should touch them.”

HAVING referred to the preservation of Moses, when an infant, from destruction, and to his heroic self-devotedness in after years, and having reminded the Hebrews that both were the results of faith, St. Paul proceeds to speak of the deliverance of Israel from bondage, reminding his countrymen that it too was faith's achievement. He particularizes three things as worthy of everlasting remembrance; the forsaking of Egypt, the keeping the passover and sprinkling of blood, and the passing through the Red Sea. The second of these things, will be the subject of our present consideration. The first and third have a natural connection, and will form a separate subject.

In that part of the history of Moses to which the words of the text refer, we discern again the true nature and genuine results of faith. He took God's word as his evidence of the approach of a catastrophe of which there was no visible sign; and believing God, he implicitly obeyed his voice. We shall find that this was the case when we compare the book of Exodus with the text; and the same comparison will discover to us the reward which this faith received. We may then consider the application of the subject, first to those to whom this epistle was originally written, and second, to the Catholic Church of God.

God was pleased, as we saw in the last lecture, to send Moses into Egypt, as the commissioned deliverer of his people the children of Israel. It is worthy of remark, as a proof of the Divine long-suffering, that the first word of threatening which was delivered in his name to Pharaoh, was the last to be put in execution. Tell him, he said, "Israel is my son, even my first-born :...let my son go, that he may serve me :...if thou refuse...I will slay thy son, even thy first-born."¹ There was nothing equivocal in this language. It announced Israel's nearness to God, and their high destiny as the first of the nations;² it warned the Egyptian monarch that if, in pride and jealousy, he sought to thwart God's purpose to exalt them, his crime should be fearfully visited; his first-born smitten, should avenge God's first-born oppressed. And it was so. Lesser plagues were sent on the Egyptians in the first place. The river was smitten; frogs, lice, and flies filled and defiled the land; their cattle, and then their harvest, were destroyed; the devouring locusts ate up the residue; darkness which might be felt, affrighted them for three days. But when these things failed to subdue the spirit of the king and to humble his obstinate people, God, true to his word, fell back on his original threatening; "I will go out" he said to Moses, "into the midst of Egypt, and all the first-born shall die."³ He then commanded him to tell the children of Israel to take steps for their own preservation. They were to take a lamb of the first year and without blemish, and to kill it in the evening. Its flesh was to be roasted with fire and to be eaten; unleavened bread and bitter herbs were to be the accompaniments of the sacred meal. They were to eat it moreover with the loins girt, the shoes on the feet, the staff in the hand, and in haste. Nor was this all; they were also to take the blood and strike it on the side-posts and upper door-posts of their houses. "For I" said the Lord, "will pass through the land of Egypt, and will smite all the first-born;" but "the blood shall be a token on the houses where ye are, and when I see the blood, I will pass over you." Moses kept "through

¹ Exodus iv. 22, 23.² Psalm lxxxix. 27.³ Exodus xi. 4, 5.

faith," as the text declares, this passover and sprinkling of blood. Human reason would have objected that there was no visible appearance of the approach of this terrible catastrophe; it would have argued with much plausibility that even though this death were on its way, Israel had no cause to fear it, and no need to take precautions against it. But Moses presumed neither to object nor to argue; he had received the Divine warning and direction, and faith asked no more. He communicated this warning and direction to the people whom he was appointed to lead, and not only complied with it himself, but caused them to comply along with him. He "called for all the elders of Israel," and declared to them the words of the Lord; and "the children of Israel went away, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses."¹

This faith was most signally rewarded; Moses and Israel with him escaped the destruction which followed. The Almighty, faithful to his threatening, smote all Egypt's first-born in that awful night, "from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne, to the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of cattle:" and the cry of a smitten people went up to heaven, "for there was not an house where there was not one dead." But not a dog moved his tongue against any of the children of Israel; they went forth unharmed and at liberty, yea they were laden with gifts and honours, for their fear fell on their oppressors. "It is a night" says the sacred historian, "to be much observed unto the Lord;" it is memorable to all generations for the destruction of his enemies, and for the glorious deliverance of the people who had trusted in his plighted word.²

I. Nearly all the examples of faith selected by the apostle in this chapter, have had some particular bearing on the circumstances in which the Hebrews were then placed. The same thing is obviously true of that which we have just considered. The Hebrews had heard their Saviour's warning,³ and were aware that destruction should soon overtake their country; yea, that destruction was already on the

¹ Exodus xii. 3—28 ² Exodus xii. 29—42. ³ Matthew xxiv. 1, 2, 15—22.

wing; they saw "the day approaching." St. Paul has reminded them of this in the immediate context, and urged them to cleave to the Saviour; he has told them expressly that it should be their only means of preservation when the tempest of wrath should arise.¹ Nothing therefore could be more seasonable than the reference which the text contains, to the preservation of their fathers on the night when Egypt was smitten. They abode, says the apostle, within their blood-sprinkled dwellings and ate their passover; and they were in safety while destruction raged without. Be ye found in like manner, he would say, feeding by faith on Christ the true passover, and sheltering yourselves under the covert of his blood; and ye also shall be in safety when God takes vengeance on his foes. There is moreover, let me observe, a most striking connection between the train of thought which the reference of the text was calculated to awaken in the mind of the believing Hebrews, and that which would be awakened by the reference immediately preceding. The bloody edict and persecuting violence of Pharaoh, together with the preservation and heroic behaviour of Moses, taught them that faith could lift above the fear of man; whilst the preservation of their fathers when Egypt was visited for that cruelty, reminded them that the same faith could deliver from the wrath of God. Cleave to your Saviour then, the apostle would say, and you shall not be afraid of your persecutors; cleave to your Saviour, he would again say, and you shall be preserved in the day of their destruction.

II. Let us not be contented however with the peculiar reference of the text to the Hebrews, but consider its catholic application and the instruction which we ourselves may derive from it. To apprehend this, we must remember the typical import of what Moses was commanded to do, and of the whole transaction to which the words before us refer. The paschal lamb was typical; its death and the sprinkling of its blood were also typical. The same character belonged to the sacrificial meal with its unleavened bread and

¹ Hebrews x. 23—31.

bitter herbs, yea even to the very peculiar and hasty manner in which that meal was to be eaten. The children of Israel in observing these things, were themselves a type; Egypt's first-born and their destruction, were the same. And finally, the preservation of those who observed this sacred solemnity, was the most important type of all. We shall consider these things in detail. They will teach us how to follow the example of Moses and of Israel; they will point out to us in the clearest manner, the way of everlasting salvation.

A lamb was provided for this solemnity. Christ is the true lamb; "Behold the Lamb of God," were the words of his inspired forerunner.¹ This lamb was without blemish; and the Lamb of God is "holy, harmless, undefiled;"² "a Lamb," says St. Peter, "without blemish and without spot."³ Israel's lamb was sacrificed as the passover-offering; and "even Christ our passover," says St. Paul, "is sacrificed for us."⁴ The true passover then was killed, when Jesus gave up the ghost. Again, when Israel's passover was killed, the blood was not allowed to be spilt on the ground, but was taken up and sprinkled on their dwellings. It is the same with the blood of the true passover; it is too precious to be wasted. "Elect unto obedience," says St. Peter, "and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ:"⁵ "let us draw near" says St. Paul, "with hearts sprinkled," for "ye are come to the blood of sprinkling."⁶ The real sprinkling however is as much better than its type, as Christ the true passover is better than Israel's lamb. For while the typical sprinkling was on the dwellings of the faithful, its antitype is on the faithful themselves, quieting the conscience and bringing heavenly peace to the heart. The texts just quoted shew this in a very striking way. St. Paul, as we have seen, says that the heart is sprinkled; and goes on to tell us that this sprinkling is "from an evil conscience." He tells us moreover, in the other scripture referred to, that "the blood of sprinkling" ministers this peace, because it "speaketh better things than that of Abel," i.e. tells of loving-kindness

¹ John i. 36. ² Hebrews vii. 26. ³ I Peter i. 18. 19. ⁴ I Corinthians v. 7.

⁵ I Peter i. 2.

⁶ Hebrews x. 22.; xii. 24.

and forgiving mercy. This explains why St. Peter has conjoined obedience with the sprinkling of Christ's blood. It is the spirit of adoption which obeys, and we are conscious to its blessed liberty as our hearts feel the power of this blood. To keep the true sprinkling of blood then, is to have peace with God through Christ, and to serve him as his children.

But Moses and Israel with him, while they sprinkled the blood, also ate the passover. To feed on Christ, is to eat the true passover. "I am the living bread which came down from heaven," said the Saviour; "and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." And again, "my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed:....he that eateth me, even he shall live by me:....whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life:....except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you."¹ It is by partaking of food that our bodies are nourished, and that we are fitted and enabled for the daily duties of life. And it is in like manner, by bearing about in daily, believing remembrance, the unspeakable love of Jesus and his everlasting mercy, that we are strengthened for his holy service, the service of his Father and our Father, his God and our God. For Christ then dwells "in our hearts by faith," and strengthens us with "might" continually "by his Spirit in the inner man."² "I am crucified with Christ," says the apostle; "nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."³ To live this life, is to keep the true passover; we feed on Christ, when we thus live by him as he lived by the Father.⁴ But lest any should profess to be so living, and to have found shelter under the covert of Christ's sprinkled blood, whilst they are cleaving in their hearts to sin and practising it in their lives, the Jewish sacrificial meal has yet more instruction for us. It was to be eaten "with unleavened bread."

¹ John vi. 51—57.

² Ephesians iii. 16, 17.

³ Galatians ii. 20.

⁴ John vi. 57.

We have an inspired exposition of this type. "Let us keep the feast," says St. Paul, "not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."¹ And he practised this precept in his own life. "Our rejoicing is this," he writes to the Corinthians, "the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world."² "Pray for us," he asks the Hebrews: "for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly."³ "Herein do I exercise myself" is his declaration before Felix, "to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men."⁴ For as unleavened bread was the necessary accompaniment of the passover, a good conscience is the necessary accompaniment and unfailing result of faith. If the one be neglected, the other cannot possibly be preserved. "Holding faith, and a good conscience," says St. Paul; "which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck."⁵ This indissoluble connection arises from the nature of faith. The blood in which we trust for pardon, reveals the malignity of sin; so that it is impossible to trust in that blood, and yet continue in the practice of iniquity. And it is equally impossible to bear about in daily remembrance, the deep reality of Christ's love to ourselves and to mankind, without being taught in return to love that Saviour sincerely, to render to him that obedience which flows from sincere affection, and to seek, for his sake, the welfare and blessing of all. If our profession of faith be without this accompaniment, God has pronounced it insincere. "If any man say, I know him," says St. John, "and keepeth not his commandments, he is a liar."⁶ These things explain also another accompaniment of the passover. It was to be eaten "with bitter herbs," typical doubtless of the bitterness of godly sorrow. Let us remember St. Peter. He denied three times, with oaths and curses, that he had ever seen his Master's face. But the injured Master turned

¹ I Corinthians v. 8.² II Corinthians i. 12.³ Hebrews xiii. 18.⁴ Acts xxiv. 16.⁵ I Timothy i. 19.⁶ I John ii. 4.

and looked on his servant. And with the look there rushed into the servant's mind the remembrance of that kindness on which he had trampled, of that faithful love to which he had proved unfaithful, of that gracious heart which his ingratitude had wounded. That look told him moreover that the injured One was still kind and gracious, and that while he deeply felt the unkindness shewn to him, he forgave it from his heart. The backslider was melted in an instant; he "went out, and wept bitterly."¹ And all pass through a similar experience who taste "that the Lord is gracious." The blood of Jesus speaking peace to the heart, is as the look which he bestowed on St. Peter. It tells us that he has loved us and given his life to save us from death; it tells us that all our past sins and provocations have been done against this love, have been our requital of this mercy; it tells us that he whom we have injured so deeply, forgives till seventy times seven, blots out our transgressions for his own sake and will not remember our sins. These assurances give peace indeed, but they make us weep bitterly. And as we go on to remember the exceeding great love of our Master and only Saviour Jesus Christ thus dying for us, we cannot forget all that we have done against him; the remembrance of sin is kept alive by the remembrance of love, and we continue to weep bitterly. Though this love teaches us moreover to walk before him in godly sincerity, making it the business of our lives to do his will, we are constrained to compare its largeness with our shortcoming, its abundance with our miserably inadequate returns, and the tears of filial and godly sorrow flow afresh as we make this comparison. And thus the things which met in the type, meet also in the antitype. The unleavened bread and bitter herbs were not to be separated from the paschal lamb and its sprinkled blood; and we shall not find them in separation now. For till the love of God has touched the heart, there will be no sincerity of desire to serve him, neither will there be any repentance to salvation. But where the slain Lamb of God is the object of unfeigned faith, and the conscience is

¹ Luke xxii. 61, 62.

pacified by his precious blood, there will be found also the sincerity of holiness and godly sorrow for sin.

Israel ate the passover, let me further observe, in a very peculiar manner. Their loins were girded, their shoes were on their feet, their staff was in their hand, and they ate as men in haste. They did so by the instructions of Moses, and their peculiar circumstances rendered these instructions necessary. As they sat down to their sacred meal, the destruction of the first-born commenced, and they expected every instant, as they ate, to hear the word of their leader commanding them to arise and follow him. No man therefore had his loins ungirt, no man had his shoes or staff to seek; all were ready, that when that word was given, they might arise and set forth immediately. And Israel in this respect is our example. As we shelter ourselves under the covert of Christ's atoning blood, and live on him by faith, we must anxiously await the word of our heavenly leader, summoning us to follow him into the everlasting kingdom, the Canaan of God. We know not at what moment that word may come; it may come at any time; Christ has left us uncertain just that we may be ready. His warning to us is that of Moses to Israel, "Let your loins be girded about...and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord."¹ If an Israelite had been found unprepared when the word of Moses was heard, he would have been left behind in Egyptian slavery. And our Lord has warned us, "Be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh,"² If our hearts be overcharged with....cares of this life, and that day come upon us unawares,³ we shall be excluded from the eternal inheritance. It will be too late then to prepare ourselves. When the cry was made "Behold the Bridegroom cometh," the foolish virgins thought to do so; but alas, "the Bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him.... and the door was shut." These foolish ones knocked indeed, but it was in vain; "I know you not," was the answer of the Lord.⁴ Let us be instructed then and let us also be

¹ Luke xii. 35, 36. ² Matt. xxiv. 44. ³ Luke xxi. 34. ⁴ Matt. xxv. 10—12.

warned ; let us have the shod feet and girded loins of the Israelite, let us eat our passover as men in haste to be gone.

I have thus endeavoured to explain the spiritual meaning of the Jewish sacrificial meal with its commanded and necessary accompaniments. Some may perhaps suppose that the Lord's Supper is the Christian passover. It may be called so in one sense, for it is the corresponding sacrament of the new dispensation ; but to speak of baptism and the Lord's Supper as if they were the antitypes of circumcision and the passover, is most dangerous and misleading language. An antitype is the spiritual reality which a type shadows forth. But we cannot say that every baptized person has received the true circumcision ; and we may deceive ourselves most fatally if we conclude that because we partake of the bread and wine, we are feeding on the true passover. It ought indeed to be so ; but, alas, with neither ordinance, is it necessarily the case. The true circumcision is "made without hands," and consists "in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh."¹ It "is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter."² He who has received such a heart and spirit from the Lord, has received the true circumcision, and will be found also feeding on the true passover. This may be made further evident from the text. Israel who kept the passover and sprinkling of blood were typical of true Christians, "the Israel of God."³ And St. Paul describes the true Christian, "We are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh."⁴ This then is the character of the keepers of the true passover. They worship and serve God as his children ; they rejoice by faith in Christ their Saviour, knowing themselves to be ruined by transgression, and having no hope except in him. It is indeed in eating the holy supper that they especially feed on him, and especially remember him, for he has said, "do this in remembrance of me." But as the

¹ Colossians ii. 11.

² Romans ii. 29.

³ Galatians vi. 16.

⁴ Philipians iii. 3.

believer always remembers, so he always feeds upon his Saviour, that he may live and walk with God. The act of the Jew was outward and was therefore quickly finished: the true Christian's act is spiritual, and is on that account continual.

But we have not yet done with the typical character of this famous transaction. Egypt also is typical. "Their dead bodies," says the Apocalyptic Seer, speaking of God's witnesses, "shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified."¹ That great city, as is manifest from the immediately-succeeding context, comprizes the people, kindreds, tongues, and nations of the earth, and is in short, this evil world. It is called Sodom for its wickedness; it is called Egypt because it has ever oppressed God's saints, and been to them the house of bondage; a character which was branded on its forehead, when it crucified the King of saints. God took vengeance on that Egypt which oppressed the seed of Abraham, by smiting its first-born. He shall take the like vengeance on spiritual Egypt. The first-born signifies whatever is pre-eminent in dignity, power, and glory. "Reuben," said his father Jacob, "thou art my first-born,... the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power."² "I will make him my first-born," says Jehovah, speaking of Messiah, "higher than the kings of the earth."³ And St. Paul testifies of him that he is "the first-born" i. e. the most excellent, the most exalted "of every creature."⁴ The first-born of Egypt then are an evident type of the excellency of this world's dignity, power, and glory. And their destruction on the very night when Moses led Israel forth, is as evidently typical of that fearful wrath which shall overtake the world in the day when Christ appears, that wrath which shall lay the excellency of man's dignity, power, and glory for ever in the dust. "The day of the Lord of Hosts" says the prophet; "shall be upon every one that is proud and lofty, and upon every one that is lifted up; and he shall be

¹ Revelation xi. 8.² Genesis xlix. 3.³ Psalm lxxxix. 27.⁴ Colossians i. 15.

brought low." The Lord shall hew down "the cedars of Lebanon" and "the oaks of Bashan;" he shall level "every high mountain," and "all the hills that are lifted up;" he shall overthrow "every high tower, and every fenced wall;" he shall break "all the ships of Tarshish," and spoil "all pleasant pictures." "The loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low: and the Lord alone shall be exalted." And the day of which he speaks thus, is the day of Christ's second appearing, when to use his own language, "the Lord ariseth to shake terribly the earth."¹ It is that day which shall bear so heavily on the haughty and the proud, which shall spoil the wealth, the pomp, and the glory of the nations. When the Lord smote the first-born, "there was a great cry in Egypt." But it was only a feeble type of that more dreadful cry which shall ascend from a smitten world.

"See, the stars from heaven are falling,
Hark, on earth the dreadful cry,
Men on rocks and mountains calling,
Hide us, hide us from his eye."

But He comes then who made rocks and mountains, and whom rocks and mountains obey, and the wide creation affords not a shelter from the searching glance of that eye and the terrible vengeance of his hand.

And shall there be no deliverance in that day of consternation and fear? Yes; in Christ deliverance shall be found. Such was the wondrous efficacy of the passover and sprinkled blood, that "he that destroyed the first-born" did not even "touch" the observers of that sacred solemnity. Moses and Israel went forth unharmed, and took the road which led to their promised inheritance, the land of milk and honey. And it shall be so again. Those who have fled for refuge to the covert of a Saviour's blood and lived by faith on Jesus, shall not only be safe in the day of the destruction of the wicked, but shall be invited by him into the eternal inheritance. They "shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting

¹ Isaiah ii. 12—19.

joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."¹

Are we then, let me ask, following the example of Moses? Are we keeping "the passover and the sprinkling of blood?" Have we received the Divine testimony concerning our ruined condition, and have we fled from the wrath to come, to the covert of the blood of Jesus? Are we now feeding on Christ by faith, cherishing the remembrance of his love and everlasting mercy as our daily and continual joy? Have we surrendered our affections to him who has loved us and had mercy on us, and is it now the object of our lives to serve him? Are we sincerely turning from every thing which grieves his holy Spirit, and are our daily offences and shortcomings the cause of our daily sorrow? And in what temper of mind are we eating the Lord's passover? Are we like men that wait for their Lord; does the mantle of earthly enjoyment hang loose about us, ready to be dropped when he shall give the word? We may all indeed have passed from this mortal stage, before Christ shall come the second time and lead his Church into her inheritance; but if we are prepared for this coming and are awaiting it joyfully, we are prepared to go to Him by death whenever he shall please to call us. Let us ask these questions of our own hearts, and return an impartial answer. An experimental acquaintance with these things is essential to our eternal salvation; if we know nothing of them, we are in danger of perishing for ever. Let us not say that we shall have peace because the blood of Christ was shed for us. Israel was saved on the night when Egypt was smitten, not merely by killing the passover, but by sprinkling its blood also, and eating it. And we, in like manner, are saved not merely because Christ has died for us, but by living on him by faith, and having our consciences pacified in his blood.

We have learned already that to partake of the holy communion is not necessarily to keep the true passover and sprinkling of blood. But it is fit that we remember on the other hand, that such participation is designed by God as

¹ Isaiah xxxv. 10.

the means of enabling us to do so, and that if we participate in faith, we are doing so. Receiving the bread as the body which was broken for us, we eat of that flesh which was given for the life of the world. And taking the cup as the new covenant of forgiveness in his blood, we receive that sprinkling of the conscience which is the assurance of eternal peace. That cup moreover looks forward to the kingdom; Christ has promised to drink it with us, when he comes again.¹ And when we drink it now in faith of this blessed promise, our affections are carried away from present things, and we are taught to look for that kingdom with expectation and ardent desire. May God grant unto us so to eat and drink at his table in his Church on earth! It shall be our preparation for eating and drinking at his table in the kingdom of glory.²

¹ Matthew xxvi. 29.

² Luke xxii. 30.

LECTURE-XVII.

Hebrews xi. 27, 29.

“By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.”

WE come now to consider those other two acts of Moses as the head and leader of Israel, to which reference was made in the last lecture. St. Paul ascribes them both to the power of faith in God. He points out in the clearest manner, the true nature of faith as displayed in them, its genuine results also, and its triumphant and glorious reward. Detailed consideration of them will bring these points successively before us; and when we have thus gathered the instruction of the text, we shall consider its application to the Hebrews and to ourselves.

By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

Moses forsook Egypt twice. He forsook it the first time through fear and alone, when Pharaoh sought to kill him; he forsook it the second time by faith, and took all Israel with him, not fearing Pharaoh's wrath. The words before us refer to this second forsaking, and to the whole transaction of the deliverance of Israel from bondage. Moses set his hand to this achievement, and in spite of Pharaoh's wrath, triumphantly accomplished it. A comparison of the text

with Old Testament-history, will throw great light upon both. We have only to refer to the circumstances in which Moses was placed, and to the work which was given him to do, to see at once that he had abundant cause for fear; whilst the words before us discover the holy principle which rendered him insensible to its influence.

Moses had forgotten the dignities and prospects of his youth, and was engaged in the humble duties of a shepherd, when God suddenly invested him with that high commission, to which reference has been already made. He desired him to proceed into Egypt, to seek an audience of Pharaoh, and to command that prince, in his name, to let his people go. This command, as Moses knew, could not be welcome. Pharaoh and his people, by keeping Israel in bondage, were then enjoying the services of nearly two millions of slaves; they had built for him his treasure-cities, and were employed by them in all manner of toil and hard labour in the field. When this errand therefore was first proposed to him, he prayed to be excused, saying, "Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh?" And even after he was assured of the Divine presence and aid, he was still unwilling to proceed: "O my Lord," he said, "send, I pray thee, by the hand of him whom thou wilt send."¹ Nor need it surprise us that he thus feared "the wrath of the king." Let us look at the feeling which is manifested on this subject by those nations which, at this day, hold property in slaves. We may take as an example, the Southern states of the American Union. The boldest-hearted philanthropist in England, would not undertake a crusade through these states against slavery; the first opening of his mouth would be his destruction. An eminent American philanthropist,² not many years ago, undertook and pleaded powerfully the cause of that degraded class. And the slave-holders of South Carolina declared that if he dared to enter their precincts, "a body-guard of twenty thousand men" should not protect him from their vengeance. And America is not singular in this feeling. This British nation once sanctioned slavery, and British merchants

¹ Exodus iii. 11. iv. 13.

² Dr. Channing.

carried on the traffic. It pleased God to stir up his people within these kingdoms, to plead with their brethren and beseech them to abandon such wickedness. And it is within the memory of the present generation that those who did so, received at the hand of Britons, as the reward of their labour of love, the most injurious, nay savage treatment. One who visited every city in England on this errand of mercy, has told us that the first glimpse of the smoke of Bristol made his heart to faint within him, and that the thought of the reception which awaited him from the merchants of that city, almost turned him back.¹ What then must Moses have felt, as he advanced from Midian and caught the first glimpse of Egypt in the distance! He had fled across its border forty years before, when interference on behalf of a single Israelite had nearly cost him his life; what violence, what furious rage must he now then have expected to encounter! These attempts of British and American philanthropy are moreover a very feeble illustration of the subject; they will not bear for a moment, comparison with his undertaking. All that was done in England, was by remonstrance and argument, and the same character belongs to all that is now done in America. But Moses was charged to demand and with authority: "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel" was his message, "Let my people go."² England and America, we must also remember, are Christian nations, under the instruction of a Christian ministry; and the speaker and listener, in argument or remonstrance addressed to them, acknowledged and still acknowledge a common God and Father, felt and still feel the humanizing influences of the same blessed and holy religion. How very different were the circumstances of Moses! He had no common feeling, no brotherly sympathy to which he might appeal; the prince and people to whom he was sent, were sunk in the most debasing heathenism. Rameses V, who then sat on the throne of Egypt, was according to the testimony of history, the Napoleon of his age, an uncontrolled and haughty despot; and till Moses sought an audience and delivered his message,

¹ Clarkson.² Exodus v. 1.

he had probably never conceived it possible that any power in heaven or earth, could interfere with his absolute will. We are astonished, as we read, that the boldness of that message did not bring down on the speaker the tyrant's immediate vengeance. And there is in truth, only one explanation of this; the protection of the invisible God was around his servant, and that panoply was "vengeance-proof."

We learn also from this last remark, what strengthened the heart of Moses and made him ultimately successful in an undertaking so full of peril. It was not the possession of miraculous powers. They were necessary indeed for the accomplishment of his appointed work, and they probably inspired Pharaoh with a superstitious dread of his person. But the text refers, not to them but to faith in God, as that which encouraged him to persevere. It also describes this faith: "He endured," it tells us, "as seeing him who is invisible." He shrank as a man, from being exposed to the wrath of Pharaoh. And he had cause to do so: the outbreaks of its fury sometimes threatened his life. Before the plague of locusts, both he and Aaron "were driven out from Pharaoh's presence."¹ And after the plague of darkness the tyrant threatened him: "See my face no more; for in that day thou seest my face thou shalt die."² But faith enabled him to endure this violence, for it assured him of God's protection, and that Pharaoh could not destroy him. He saw with the outward eye the king of Egypt frowning in his rage, but the eye of faith discerned the King of heaven smiling in his love. And the smile visible to faith only, which he thus discerned in the Divine countenance, enabled Moses to bear the frown of man. What a striking testimony this affords to the true nature of faith! It is indeed both the evidence and substantial presence of things not seen: Moses "endured, as *seeing*;" i.e. he was inspired by it with the boldness of a man *who actually saw* the invisible God beside him. And we cannot follow him through his long course of arduous and anxious trial from his first audience of Pharaoh to the night of his forsaking Egypt, without

¹ Exodus x. 11.

² Exodus x. 28.

being furnished with an equally striking example of that persevering determination to do the will of God which is faith's natural and necessary result. Nor must we forget the events of that night, the smiting of the first-born and the deep humiliation to which the haughty Pharaoh was in consequence reduced. He implored the departure of Israël; he even begged their blessing.¹ For these things set before us, in a manner equally striking and consolatory, faith's certain, abundant, and most glorious reward.

It will be acknowledged at once that these remarks apply to the bold and determined manner in which Moses demanded the deliverance of Israel, and persevered in doing so, till he achieved it. But it may be objected that St. Paul in the text, refers more especially to the closing scene of this fearful drama, the actual forsaking of Egypt; and surely, it may be said, such an act required no faith; for no further wrath was to be dreaded. Pharaoh, as we have just seen, was now imploring Israel to be gone, and his subjects were as urgent as their king. We read in the book of Exodus, that the people "were thrust out of Egypt, and could not tarry."² And we are told by the Psalmist that "Egypt was glad at their departing, for they were afraid of them."³ St. Paul however ascribes this forsaking to faith; and if we look a little deeper than the surface, we may come to be of one mind with him. Notwithstanding the promising appearances to which we have referred, Pharaoh and his people were not willing that Israel should leave their service. They had given permission indeed, they had even added entreaty; but they were acting under the influence of terror, under the immediate pressure of the heavy hand of God. Their conduct under such circumstances, was no guarantee therefore of their real feelings and no security for their future behaviour; Pharaoh had often before, when placed in the same circumstances, granted them permission to depart; but when the danger was over, he had as often revoked his word. Israel was an undisciplined multitude of men, women, and children, broken and dispirited by ages of slavery, and

¹ Exodus xii. 31, 32. ² Exodus xii. 39. ³ Psalms cv. 37. P. B. V.

totally unable to fight in their own defence. And if their leader took advantage of this momentary panic and attempted to lead them forth from bondage, he incurred a fearful risk when that panic should subside. Pharaoh would doubtless come down upon them at the head of his disciplined armies, and either lead them back into severer bondage, or fall upon them with the sword. The wise, considerate, and thoughtful Moses must have contemplated the probability of such an issue. And it therefore did require faith on his part to forsake Egypt on that night, even that faith which lifts above the fear of man by assuring us of the protection of the invisible God.

The sequel of the text, to which we now proceed, will prove at once that these observations are founded in truth.

By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians essaying to do were drowned.

This signal interposition of God on behalf of his people and for the destruction of his enemies, was brought about by the occurrence of the very circumstance to the probability of which I have just referred. Egypt had scarcely granted to Israel the emancipation which terror had wrung from her, when she repented of her lenity and softness, and sought to repossess herself of her Hebrew slaves. And while as yet these emancipated ones were only beginning to rejoice in their deliverance, and before time had been allowed them to cross the Egyptian border, Pharaoh gathering together his captains, his chariots, and his horsemen, pursued after them to bring them back. Israel, encumbered with their baggage, their women, and their little ones, travelled slowly and were soon overtaken. They were encamping before the Red Sea, having the wilderness behind them and impassable rocks on either hand, when they lifted up their eyes, and behold the Egyptians were upon them. Into what a condition has Moses, by forsaking Egypt, brought the people who followed him! Whither now can he lead them? There was no path of escape either on the right hand or the left ;

before them were the waters, behind them the incensed Egyptians. And the people themselves, aware of the peril of their circumstances, bitterly remonstrated with their leader. "Because there were no graves in Egypt" they said, "hast thou taken us away to die in the wilderness.... is not this the word that we did tell thee, saying, let us alone....wherefore hast thou dealt thus with us, to carry us forth out of Egypt?" But Moses had forsaken Egypt by faith, and knew that God would not desert him. Staying himself therefore in this hour of trial, on him in whom he believed, he comforted the dismayed people; "Fear ye not" he said, "the Lord shall fight for you." And God was faithful to the man who trusted in him. He opened for him and for the people who followed him, a passage through death and destruction into life, making "the depths of the sea," in the magnificent language of the prophet, "a way for the ransomed to pass over."¹ "Lift thou up thy rod," he said to Moses, "and stretch out thine hand over the sea, and divide it: and the children of Israel shall go on dry ground through the midst of the sea." To encourage them moreover to obey this command, and in further assurance of his gracious protection, "the angel of God, which went before the camp of Israel, removed and went behind them; and the pillar of the cloud," the symbol of the Divine presence, "came between" them and their oppressors; so that while the darkness of the night lasted, they were safe from molestation. Moses in the meantime, obedient to the word of the Lord, "stretched out his hand over the sea; and the Lord" remembering his word, "caused the sea to go back by a strong east-wind," made it dry land, and divided the waters. Nor did Israel shrink in that trying moment. They followed their leader into the midst of it, walking on "dry ground," having the waters as "a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left." But their triumph was not yet complete. The Egyptians, unhumbled by all their past experience, and unconvinced even by this last demonstration of God's favour to his people, presumed to follow them through the divided

¹ Isaiah li. 10.

waters. And they were able to do so, for these waters kept their upright position. But it was only for a time, till the last straggling follower of the camp of Israel had gained the opposite shore. "The sea then returned to his strengththe Lord overthrew the Egyptians in the midst of it.... the waters covered the chariots, the horsemen, and all the host of Pharaoh....there remained not so much as one of them....and Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the sea-shore." Such was the glorious event of that ever-memorable night and morning, proclaiming God to all generations as the protector of his people and the destroyer of his foes.¹

But we must look into it more narrowly, for there is not a more striking example to be found in the Scriptures of God, of the nature, the results, and the glorious reward of faith. Let us contemplate Moses and Israel, as they stood on the brink of the Red Sea, and gazed upon its waters. There was no outward appearance of these waters being divided; and since the world began, such a thing had not been heard. But God had said that it should be so on this occasion; and Moses taking his word as "the evidence of things not seen," lifted up his rod and gave the sign to nature to obey its Creator's will. And when the sea was divided in obedience to that sign, Moses and Israel taking the same word as their evidence that these watery walls should not fall and drown them as they marched along, and that the slimy bottom of the deep should afford solid ground for their feet to rest on, descended fearlessly into the gulph between. Had we seen them as they did so, had we seen rank after rank of that countless multitude of men, women, and children descending into the depths of the sea, and judged their conduct by human reason, we should have pronounced it the result of madness. It was the result however of something very different,—of faith in God. Never since the world began, had he given such a command to any people; never since the world began, had his name been so signally glorified by any people's obedience. And their reward was proportionate. If we fear to trust the Lord, and feel disposed

¹ Exodus xiv.

when in difficulty and trouble, to question the Divine faithfulness, let us contemplate Moses and Israel on the further bank of the Red Sea, with the haughty Pharaoh breathless at their feet, and the dead Egyptians strewed around them. Let us listen to the song of the men, "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power: thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy;" let us catch the responsive note of the women, "Sing ye to the Lord, for he hath triumphed gloriously; the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea."¹ Our hearts peradventure may be animated with the same sacred fire, and we may learn from the contemplation to say with the holy Psalmist, "O Lord of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in thee."²

And St. Paul, be it observed, is especially careful to mark this triumph of Israel as the reward of faith; for he adds most emphatically, "which the Egyptians essaying to do." They saw Israel attempt the passage of the sea successfully, and judging that what their despised slaves could do, was competent for them also, they immediately essayed to follow them. They knew not the secret of the Lord, that this passage was the work of faith. But the result of their attempt soon proved it. The sea had rolled back before the people who trusted in its great Creator; its waters had stood as if spell-bound while they marched through; but it owed no such reverence to his unbelieving enemies. It returned therefore to its strength and overthrew them; its waters fell on them, and they "were drowned." We learn thus on the one hand from this solemn and amazing transaction, that salvation is, in God's righteousness, the meet reward of faith; we are warned on the other, that overthrow and ruin are the recompense of presumptuous unbelief.

It is not difficult to discern the object of St. Paul in directing the attention of the Hebrews to these two instances of faith. They were then, as has been already mentioned, exposed to the wrath of man, and the Apostle would prove to them that faith was able to lift the mind above its

¹ Exodus xv. 6, 20, 21.

² Psalm lxxxiv. 12.

influence. He has already for this purpose, referred twice to the history of Moses, and now refers to it a third time. There is moreover a climax in his references. It proved the power of that holy principle that the parents of Moses, in defiance of the edict of the first Pharaoh, should have hid their child. It was a more emphatic proof of it when Moses himself, residing in the court of Egypt and under that monarch's eye, espoused openly and fearlessly the cause of his persecuted brethren. And it was the most emphatic proof of all, when he deliberately returned from Midian, and bearding the lion in his den, delivered the prey from his teeth. But there is something more definite in the first reference of the text. To set his brethren free from bondage, was the object to which Moses directed his energies, and it was for his zeal in the prosecution of that object that he incurred the wrath of the king. The believing Hebrews in like manner, were now being emancipated from the bondage of the law, and were going on to taste the sweets of gospel-liberty. But they were deterred from advancing, and almost forced back into thralldom, by the furious wrath of their unbelieving brethren. St. Paul reminds them therefore that when Moses had set his heart on the deliverance of himself and his people, faith had enabled him to endure patiently the threats and violence of Pharaoh. And if your hearts, he would say, are set as anxiously on spiritual emancipation, the faith which strengthened Moses, will strengthen you also, and no rage of the persecutor shall keep you back from the enjoyment of that liberty "wherewith Christ hath made us free." Speak not, he would add in his second reference, of the difficulties which beset your path; faith has no difficulties, and nothing shall be impossible to it. Think of your fathers at the Red Sea, and remember how God appeared for them. The same God is your God also; he who made the depths of the sea on that memorable occasion, a way for his ransomed to pass over, promises now that his redeemed ones shall come with singing to Zion. "Who art thou" then, as your own Isaiah addresses you, "that thou shouldest be afraid of a man that

shall die, and of the son of man which shall be made as grass, and forgettest the Lord thy maker?"¹

This subject is fitted to teach us also very solemn and important lessons. Egypt, as we learned in the last lecture, is the type of this evil world, and every one who is living in disobedience to God, is at this moment a bond-slave to its king. "In time past," says St. Paul to the Ephesians, "ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience." These words concern us very nearly, for we are all in this evil condition till rescued by the grace of God. We may not flatter ourselves that it cannot be so because we have always been members of God's Church, and our lives have been decent and irreproachable. No one could be possessed of more distinguished religious privileges, no one could be more irreproachable in his life and conversation, than was Saul the persecutor. He was an upright, conscientious, and zealous member of the only Church then existing in the world. "If any other man thinketh," he tells us, that he may "trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel... an Hebrew of the Hebrews...touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless."² "My manner of life from my youth," he testifies before Agrippa, "know all the Jews; ...after the straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee."³ And he characterizes that life from its commencement, in these remarkable words, "I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day."⁴ But with what feelings does Paul the servant of Christ look back on this life of blamelessness? Let him be his own witness. He had reminded the once-abandoned Ephesians, as we have just seen, that they had been servants of Satan and children of disobedience, and he proceeds immediately to include himself along with them. "Among whom also," he says, "WE ALL had our conversation in times past...fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath,

¹ Isaiah li. 9—13.

² Philippians iii. 4—6.

³ Acts xxvi. 4, 5.

⁴ Acts xxiii. 1.

even as others."¹ When the law of God came home to his conscience in its spirituality, breadth, and extent, he made the humbling discovery that he was "carnal, sold under sin." Circumcised Hebrew of the Hebrews as he was, he found that he lacked the circumcision of the heart, and was not a Jew inwardly;² distinguished as he had been for moral uprightness and religious zeal, he found that he had been living for himself only; and as one therefore who had sinned and come short of God's glory, he found that he was exposed to wrath. But it pleased God, as he tells us elsewhere,³ to reveal Christ in his heart. He found in him deliverance from condemnation, and was by his grace set free from the law of sin and death.⁴ And the self-righteous Pharisee, transformed thus into the humbled and penitent believer, began to walk at liberty as the servant of Jesus Christ. Now these Scriptures set before us the experience of every one who has been taught in truth to serve the Lord. Some are found originally in the condition of the Ephesians, openly trampling on the commandments of God, and living in all uncleanness. Others, like Saul the persecutor, are distinguished by the blamelessness of their lives, and by their strict observance of all the forms of religion. But the difference is not essential; they are equally far from the spiritual service of God, and differ only in the character of the sin which enslaves them. Both therefore require emancipation by the revelation of Jesus in the heart. But who shall describe its new-creating energy? It constrains the sinner to forsake his lusts; it teaches the moralist to cast away his self-righteous confidences; it presents something better to the outwardly religious than his efficacious forms. There is no parley nor hesitation where that blessed light has shone; all flee for refuge with one consent, to the one hope set before them in the gospel. This is the first step from bondage into liberty, from Egypt toward Canaan; for with this blessed knowledge of the Saviour the service of God begins.

¹ Ephesians ii. 2, 3.² Romans ii. 28, 29.³ Galatians i. 16.⁴ Romans vii. 9—14; viii. 1, 2.

"He is the freeman whom the truth makes free,
And all are slaves beside."

But we cannot take this step without awakening against us the wrath of the world's prince; Satan sets himself as determinedly to prevent our spiritual emancipation as the king of Egypt did to prevent the deliverance of Israel. And if we prevail in defiance of him, to burst our bonds and take the road to Canaan, we earn as our recompense, his bitter hatred. The Apocalyptic Seer tells us that he makes war to the end with those "who keep the commandments of God;"¹ and St. Peter exhorts to vigilance "because our adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."² It is not because Satan is changed since these words were written, but because God in his holy providence restrains his fury, that any one is now permitted to serve the Lord in peace. And even as it is, he tries every means to thwart and hinder us in this heavenly path, surrounding us, according to our different conditions and circumstances, with difficulties of every form and name. The ridicule of former associates in evil tries the constancy of one; the influence of carnal relatives is the discouragement of a second; whilst the hopes and prospects of this world, combined with fears of worldly loss and trouble, prove the snare and hindrance of a third. The tempter moreover in taking advantage of these unpropitious outward circumstances, is assisted to a fearful extent by the traitor within the citadel, the sin that is in our own hearts. And the difficulties which obstruct the path of every one who would forsake Egypt and make good his way to Canaan, are in consequence so great, that unless we have that faith which is the spring of perseverance, we shall find it impossible to proceed. We must learn, with Moses, to stay ourselves on the invisible God; we must believe in his Fatherly love, and look for his continual help. Our way shall then be cleared as we advance; difficulties which seemed insurmountable shall disappear, as the Red Sea parted and gave passage to

¹ Revelation xii. 17.

² 1 Peter v. 8.

the children of Israel; and our peace increasing daily even in this world, shall issue at last in the peace of eternity.

But whilst we are not to be discouraged by difficulties on the one hand, the text warns us against presumption on the other. That others have triumphed in circumstances similar to ours, is no proof that we shall do so; if they triumphed, it was because they believed in the Lord. When Pharaoh called on his people to follow Israel into the depths of the sea, he might have said and with apparent reason, These slaves fear nothing, and shall my soldiers tremble? But we know the result; the path which was salvation to the one, proved ruin and destruction to the other. And it is so still; "the ways of the Lord are right, and the just shall walk in them: but the transgressors shall fall therein."¹ "Now the just shall live by faith,"² and self-confidence is the transgression, "the sin which doth so easily beset us."³ And while God's believing people therefore are enabled to persevere in his ways, and wax stronger and stronger, those who trust in their own wisdom and ability shall fall in these ways and never rise again. This is in short, the twofold lesson which this precious subject teaches. It promises salvation and triumph, if we believe with Moses; it warns of overthrow and perdition if we presume with Pharaoh. May the Lord write these lessons on our hearts!

¹ Hosea xiv. 9.

² Hebrews x. 38.

³ Hebrews xii. 1.

LECTURE XVIII.

Hebrews xi. 30, 31.

“By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.”

THE three last examples of faith have been taken from the history of Moses and of that generation of Israel which he was appointed to lead. Following the stream of Jewish history, St. Paul now reminds the Hebrews that the same holy principle strengthened the next generation of their fathers, under the conduct of Joshua, to subdue the land of Canaan. For Jericho was the first city of the Canaanites which fell into Israel's hands, and its capture opened the way to the acquisition of the whole country. He also takes advantage of a remarkable circumstance connected with the fall of Jericho, viz. the preservation of Rahab, one of its inhabitants, from destruction, to set before those to whom he was writing another example of that precious faith, to the exercise of which he now sought to stir them up.

This subject when considered in detail, will be found equally full of valuable instruction with those which have preceded it. The fall of Jericho and the preservation of Rahab exhibit in a most striking manner the nature of faith, the results to which it leads, and the reward which, in the faithfulness of God, it cannot fail in the end, to receive. Having considered the subject in this light, and in its

peculiar reference to the circumstances of the Hebrews, we shall seek to gather from it lessons of catholic truth.

By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

Having delivered Israel from the bondage of Egypt, led them through the Red Sea, and afterwards guided them for forty years in the wilderness, Moses resigned his charge and his life together on the borders of the promised land. God then raised up Joshua to succeed him. Under his conduct Israel marched through the parted waters of the Jordan, and passed over into the land of their inheritance, "right against Jericho." Jericho was a city of the Jebusites, one of the seven nations whose country had been given to Abraham. Joshua invested it closely, thinking most probably to take it by ordinary warfare. Such however was not the purpose of the Lord. We read that when Israel was by Jericho, a man appeared to their leader with his sword drawn in his hand, and announcing himself as "captain of the host of the Lord," commanded Joshua to loose his shoe from off his foot, for the place whereon he stood was holy. These intimations declare plainly who this distinguished stranger was. He was the same who sat under the tree with Abraham and suffered him, before they parted, to plead for Sodom;¹ who permitted Jacob to wrestle with him, and bestowed on that patriarch the name of Israel;² who appeared to Moses in a flame of fire in a bush.³ Well might Joshua ask, "What saith my Lord unto his servant?" He who spake to him was THE SON OF GOD, THE REDEEMER AND KING OF ISRAEL. Let us next attend to what he said, for it was by faith in his words that the walls of Jericho fell down. His first word was one of large encouragement; "I have given into thine hand" he said, "Jericho, and the king thereof, and the mighty men of valour." He then proceeded to give directions. Israel was to compass the city daily, for six days, and seven priests were to bear before the ark seven trumpets of rams' horns.

¹ Genesis xiv.

² Genesis xxxii. 24—32

³ Exodus iii. 1—6.

But when the seventh day came, they were to compass the city seven times, and the priests were to blow with the trumpets. "And it shall come to pass," said the Lord, "when they make a long blast with the rams' horn, and when ye hear the sound of the trumpet, all the people shall shout with a great shout; and the wall of the city shall fall down flat, and the people shall ascend up every man straight before him." Joshua believed these words, for as we shall see immediately, he acted on them. How very striking is the example thus afforded, of the true nature of faith! Joshua was now before one of those cities which the spies that went up with him forty years before, had described as "great and walled up to heaven."¹ He was followed by an army, numerous indeed but unaccustomed to war, for they had only begun to prove the reality of contest with an enemy. The people whose country he had invaded and with whom he had now to contend, were proverbial in that age of the world, both for valour and strength; the report of their stature and prowess had so intimidated the former generation of Israel,¹ that they lost heart on the borders of their inheritance and fell back to die in the wilderness. What had Joshua to set against these things? What assured him that he should be successful in his present attempt? The word of the Captain of the Lord's Host was his assurance; he had spoken and his servant believed. Nor was this all. That word had spoken not of success merely, but of success in a particular way, viz., by compassing the city, blowing with trumpets and shouting. This mode of proceeding, it is needless to say, afforded no human probability of triumph; it mocked human reason, and since the world began, such a thing had not been heard. Joshua therefore had nothing on which to stay his heart, save only the word of God. But that word is "the evidence of things not seen;" Joshua asked no more; he believed that it should be even as God had said to him.

His behaviour proved that this faith was genuine. For six successive days, though no result followed, he marched

¹ Numbers xiii. 26—33. Deuteronomy i. 28.

at the head of Israel round the devoted city; and the priests, as they passed on before the ark, blew with the trumpets by his command. When the seventh day was come, he compassed it seven times; at the seventh time "when the priests blew with the trumpets," he said "to the people, Shout;" and Israel participating in their leader's confidence in God, shouted when they heard the word. Such was the result of faith; we see it in this unhesitating, unquestioning, implicit obedience. And its reward also is recorded. "The wall fell down flat,...the people went up,...every man straight before him, and they took the city." The historical records of the Old Testament thus verify the statements of the New. For the book of Joshua tells us, in perfect harmony with the text, that the walls of Jericho fell down before a people who believed God's word.¹

This however is not the only example of faith recorded in the text. It proceeds,—

By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

Rahab the harlot was one of the inhabitants of Jericho. Her story is simple and affecting. It requires no proof that in original character she resembled her abandoned countrymen; but her heart was softened, whilst theirs were hardened to their ruin. She had heard in common with them, that the Lord had dried up the Red Sea before his people, and that he had delivered the two kings of the Amorites, Sihon and Og, into their hands. She was aware with them, that Israel came into Canaan as the commissioned messenger of God's vengeance; and with them also she was filled in consequence, with consternation and fear. But she drew a conclusion from all this which her countrymen failed to draw; "The Lord your God" was her language to the spies of Joshua, "he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath." The result of this faith is especially noticed in the text. Believing that these spies were the servants of the one true

¹ Joshua v. 13—15. vi.

God, she received them "with peace," lodging them in her house, and carefully concealing them from the eager search of her countrymen. She also sued to them for mercy. "Swear unto me by the Lord" she said, "and give me a true token that ye will save alive my father, and my mother, and my brethren...and deliver our lives from death." They gave the assurance which she sought, charging her only to bring her father's household to her own dwelling in the day of vengeance, and to bind a line of scarlet thread, the pledge of safety, in the window. And here we have another example of her faith; she believed the word and oath of these servants of the God of Israel, and bound that scarlet thread in her window as soon as she had sent them away. How very different was the spirit manifested by the other inhabitants of Jericho! Though filled with consternation at the approach of their terrible enemy, they "believed not" in him whose long-provoked vengeance had sent that enemy to destroy them; and so far therefore from humbling themselves and suing for his pardon, they sought to kill his messengers.

The reward which this faith of Rahab received, is also noticed in the text. The day of vengeance came; Jericho was taken, and her unbelieving people perished. Their doom was indeed most fearful; imagination can picture nothing more terrific than the scene which must have ensued in Jericho when her protecting walls fell flat. The words of the spies to Rahab, "Whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head," remind us of the poet's awfully-descriptive language,—

"Hark to the haste of flying feet
As they splash in the blood of the slippery street."

It must have been so on that day, within that devoted city. Men, women, and children, as we know from the inspired record, fell by hundreds, nay by thousands, before the avenging sword; the dismayed and affrighted Canaanite sought protection in every corner of his city from the wrath of Israel, but sought it in vain; the shrieks of anguish, horror, and despair waxed louder and louder and louder, and only

ceased when there was none to complain, because nothing breathing was left alive. What a blessed contrast to this scene of havoc and desolation was presented, in the mean time, within believing Rahab's dwelling! She was sitting with her parents, her brothers, and sisters beside her, and the scarlet thread was bound in the window, the pledge and assurance of safety. She heard doubtless the shrieks of horror in the street below, but in calm reliance on the truth of the God of Israel, she heard them unaffrighted. How rich, how precious was her reward! It was peace in the midst of alarm, preservation in the midst of destruction, life in the midst of death. She was adopted also by the people who had saved her, and lived for many years in Israel in honour and esteem, partaking largely of God's abundant goodness toward his favoured heritage, the seed of Abraham his friend.¹

THE train of thought which these references to Jewish history were designed to awaken in the minds of the believing Hebrews, was suited to their circumstances, and calculated to be most profitable. They had set their faces toward the heavenly inheritance, but were sadly hindered on their way. St. Paul has therefore just reminded them, as we saw in the last lecture, of the passage of the Red Sea; proving thereby that faith has no difficulties, that every thing yields to its energy. And he now follows up that reference by reminding them of the capture of Jericho; the same faith, he says, which parted the waters, overthrew the Canaanite before our fathers, and subdued the land of promise. The Hebrews were also instructed by these references, in the necessity of persevering faith. For they could not forget that those very men who had passed the Red Sea, had fainted and turned back when they beheld the cities of Canaan. It is not enough, the Apostle seemed to say, that you overcome one difficulty; you must add conquest to conquest and triumph to triumph, and never think your labour ended till you sit down in peace, under your vine and fig-tree, in the promised inheritance of the Lord. The encompassing of

¹ Joshua ii. vi. 21—25.

Jericho for seven days before it fell, was designed, let me remark, to impress on them the same lesson. The number seven in holy Scripture, always denotes completeness. Patience had its complete and perfect work in their fathers, for they complied implicitly with the Divine directions, and waited during six days till the appointed signal was given; and this behaviour was fitted to teach their children "Ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise."¹ Nor was the reference to Rahab without important meaning. Their circumstances resembled hers, for they had received with peace the servants of the true Joshua, the apostles and ministers of Christ. There was also another resemblance; a more fearful destruction than that which overwelmed Jericho, was at this moment awaiting Jerusalem and Judea. They are therefore reminded of her reward, that in the faithfulness of the God of Israel she was preserved in the day of ruin. And your reward, the apostle would say, shall be the same; when destruction overwhelms your unbelieving countrymen, a thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand, but it shall not come nigh you.²

BUT the catholic instruction which may be learned from these verses, is for more deserving of our attention than any peculiar application of their contents. The taking of Jericho, like the keeping of the passover, was typical of things to come. The parties principally concerned, viz. Joshua, Israel, and the people of Jericho, were evident and remarkable types. Joshua was a type of Christ. His name indicates this; Jehoshua or Jesus signifies God the Saviour. His office indicates it still more; for the work assigned to him was to lead Israel into the earthly Canaan. And Jesus shall in like manner, in the coming day of glory, lead the saints of God, of whom Israel was a type, into the heavenly Canaan, the inheritance prepared for them from the foundation of the world. The earth which now groans under the oppression of the wicked, shall then like Canaan of old, vomit forth its wicked inhabitants,³ and shall be given into

¹ Hebrews x. 36.² Psalm xci. 7.³ Leviticus xviii. 24, 28.

the hands of Christ and his people that they may possess it for ever. And Jericho of which Joshua said, "It shall be accursed, it and all that are therein;" of which he said also after its destruction, "Cursed be the man before the Lord, that buildeth it;"¹ Jericho is as evidently typical of the wicked nations of this evil world. For they shall receive their doom in the day when the Saviour is revealed, from his hand and from the hand of his saints, being broken as with a rod of iron and dashed in pieces like a potter's vessel. The Father has conferred this honour on the Son,² and Christ has promised to associate his people with him.³ "I saw heaven opened" says the Apocalyptic Seer, "and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True...The armies which were in heaven followed him... Out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron."⁴ It is no fancy which sees in the destruction of Jericho the type of these awful events; it is plainly pointed out to us by the circumstances which attended it. Joshua and Israel, as we have already seen, marched round that devoted city, whilst the priests who accompanied the host blew with the trumpets for seven successive days. No result followed during the first day or the second, during the third or the fourth, during the fifth or the sixth day. And when these trumpet-blasts were heard on the seventh day, during Israel's six successive marches round the city, its inhabitants, secure in their strength, listened to them peradventure with derision. But when they said "peace and safety," "sudden destruction" came. For at the seventh trumpet-blast of that seventh day Israel's leader gave the word; it was answered immediately by the shout of the host which followed him; the protecting walls fell flat, and the miserable inhabitants of Jericho became a prey to the avenging sword. Let us compare with all this what is written in the book of Revelation. The subject-matter of that book is the fall of this wicked world into the hand of Christ for judgment; and the Seer has

¹ Joshua vi. 17, 26.² Psalm ii. 8, 9.³ Revelation ii. 26, 27.⁴ Revelation xix. 11—15.

distinctly marked the prophetic circumstances attending that awful event. It shall take place, he tells us, when seven seals have been opened; when seven trumpets have been blown; when seven thunders have uttered their voices; when seven vials have been poured out. We have at present to do especially with the trumpets. "I saw seven angels," says the Seer, "and to them were given seven trumpets;" "the seven angels," he continues, "prepared themselves to sound." He then declares the effects of their several soundings. The first trumpet-blast affects the earth; the second affects the sea; the third poisons the rivers and fountains of waters; the fourth darkens the luminaries of heaven. A pause then ensues, and a voice of warning is heard. But judgment quickly recommences; the fifth angel sounds and the bottomless pit is opened; the sixth sounds and four terrible destroyers are loosed. Still however the great city abides in her strength; the earth continues the abode of wickedness, and the prince of this world seems rather to increase his sway. But his time is short: the seventh angel sounds and it is immediately proclaimed aloud—"THE KINGDOMS OF THIS WORLD ARE BECOME THE KINGDOMS OF OUR LORD."¹ The king also comes down to take them. "The Lord himself" says St. Paul, "shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God."² This "trump of God" is the seventh trumpet of which mention has just been made. And the shout of Christ, when that trumpet is blown, shall be echoed by the shout of his people. Theirs are the "great voices" which proclaim that the kingdom is come; the "voices" which concur with the thunders of Jehovah, announcing "It is done;" the overwhelming halleluiahs which sound abroad through creation that "The Lord God omnipotent reigneth."³ So that the same three things which marked the fall of Jericho, viz. the trumpets, the shout, and the mysterious symbolic seven, shall mark also the day of final reckoning. For "the great trumpet shall be blown,"⁴

¹ Revelation viii. ix, x. xi. ² I Thessalonians iv. 16.

³ Revelation xi. 15; xvi. 17, 18; xix. 1-6. ⁴ Isaiah xxvii. 13.

Christ and his redeemed ones shall raise the shout of victory, and this wicked world shall fall under the weight of God's tremendous wrath. There was another circumstance connected with the fall of Jericho, it was never to be rebuilt. It shall be the same with this evil world. "The earth is utterly broken down" says the prophet... "the transgression thereof shall be heavy upon it; and it shall fall, and not rise again."¹ When it was judged by the waters of Noah, its desolation was repaired; men began again to overspread the earth, and human society was reconstituted. But after its judgment by fire, there shall be no second rebuilding. The world indeed shall still continue, and human society shall again enliven the face of the earth, but nothing shall be as it now is; every thing shall be changed. At present, it is "man's day,"² for man is now lord and ruler of the earth, and his will is its law. But it shall then be "the Lord's day;"³ Christ shall then be Lord and ruler, and God's will shall be the only law of creation. Wickedness indeed shall again raise its head for a moment, but only that it may be crushed for ever.⁴

The case of Rahab instructs us in another way. She was a citizen of Jericho, and was in danger of perishing in its overthrow; we are by nature citizens of this evil world, and are in danger of sharing its doom. By receiving the spies however and binding the scarlet thread in her window, Rahab was not only saved from death but was adopted by Joshua and Israel. And we in like manner, may not only be saved from eternal death, but become of the true Israel. The history of the fall of Jericho contains thus a twofold type. In Rahab's original condition we see what we are by nature, "children of wrath;"⁵ in Israel of whom she became one, we see what we become by grace, "the household of God."⁶

If we desire then to make this transition, to pass from nature to grace, from condemnation to acceptance, let us follow the example of Rahab, receiving the servants of the

¹ Isaiah xxiv. 19, 20. ² I Corinthians iv. 3; original. ³ Revelation i. 10.

⁴ Revelation xx. 7-10. ⁵ Ephesians ii. 3. ⁶ Ephesians ii. 19.

true Joshua and binding in our windows the scarlet thread. "We are ambassadors for Christ," says St. Paul; "we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God" for "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them."¹ Such is the character and such the message of the servants of the true Joshua; we must receive this message with joy. And the scarlet thread which they tender, must appear on our dwellings, i.e. the blood of Christ, the substance of apostolic ministry, must sprinkle the conscience and bring peace to the heart. Rahab having done these things, waited for the coming overthrow. She wept doubtless for her miserable country, but her own heart was in peace. At length the preparations were made; Israel passed the Jordan and began to invest the city. Her eye watched them for six successive days, as they compassed it, blowing with the trumpets; she saw them on the seventh day, go round it for six successive times. And if she was instructed in their intentions, what must have been her feelings when she saw them prepare to go round it for the seventh time, when she saw the priests put the trumpets again to their lips! The wealth of worlds would have been no exchange to her at that instant, for the precious scarlet thread. It becomes us then to put the like value on the precious blood of Jesus, FOR WE ARE AT THIS MOMENT IN RAHAB'S VERY CIRCUMSTANCES. We are yet in this evil world, but are waiting for its overthrow. The Apocalyptic angels have begun to blow, yea, as far as we can gather from the prophetic page, six of their trumpets have been blown already. We are now, I believe, in the condition indicated in the tenth chapter of the Apocalypse: the assurance has gone forth that when the seventh trumpet shall be blown, time shall be no longer, and we know not at what instant its summons may rend the air. Blessed then are those who are indeed of God's adoption through faith in the blood of Jesus, who can indeed say of the true Joshua, "Lo, this is our God;...and he will save us!"²

But there is something in this subject which warns us

¹ II Corinthians v. 19, 20.

² Isaiah xxv. 9.

against self-deception. Let us observe the nature of that faith by which Rahab was saved from destruction: it led her to humble herself and to sue for mercy. And this is the character of all true faith. We may see it in the thief on the cross; "Lord, remember me:"¹ we may see it in Saul the persecutor; "Behold, he prayeth."² Let us observe also the results of Rahab's faith; she took part with God's Israel against her idolatrous country, for she hid the messengers which Joshua sent. And the results of true faith are still the same. It leads us to take part with God and his people against sinners and their ways. The indissoluble connection moreover between such faith and such results, is marked in a most striking and beautiful manner by one circumstance in Rahab's story. We are expressly told that she bound the scarlet thread in the very window by which she had let down the spies.³ When these spies returned therefore with the victorious army of Joshua, that window with its scarlet memorial would remind them at once of their plighted word and of the kindness which Rahab had shewn to them. It is the same still, and will be so to the end. The heart which confides in God's mercy through the blood of Jesus, will also favour God's cause; and if we can stand in judgment as those who have trusted in the Cross, the Judge will assuredly be able to say to us, "I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat."⁴ What is commonly called faith, will not bear comparison with this. Men believe that there is a great and glorious Being who has created them and on whom they are dependent; they acknowledge also that they have sinned against him and deserve his wrath. But nothing which they believe about him leads them to sue for his pardon, to put their trust in his grace, to surrender their affections to him, or to forsake their sins at his command. We need not ask whether God regards this as faith. "Thou believest that there is one God;" says St. James, "thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"⁵ And this

¹ Luke xxiii. 42.² Acts ix. 11.³ Joshua ii. 18, 21.⁴ Matthew xxv. 35.⁵ James ii. 19, 20.

testimony is supported by the text. The men of Jericho had this faith; they trembled at the approaching vengeance of the God of Israel; and yet we are told that they "believed not." If "a man say he hath faith, and have not works" asks the same apostle, "can faith save him?"¹ It did not save the men of Jericho: they were overwhelmed in ruin. And it is equally powerless to save now.

There is something in this subject, let me observe finally, at once to encourage and to humble. She who was saved in the day of her country's ruin, was "Rahab the harlot." Her case is thus parallel with that of the dying thief, who crying with her "Lord remember me," was with her answered in God's abundant mercy. And her abandoned countrymen might have been saved along with her, if they would have humbled themselves as she did. We read of all the inhabitants of Canaan that "it was of the Lord to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour."² The case of the thief in like manner, does not stand by itself in New Testament-Scripture; Corinth, that city of lasciviousness and crime, was filled with thieves, with fornicators and adulterers, but many of these abandoned sinners found mercy in the blood of Jesus.³ Let no one therefore despair; we have the assurance at once of the Old Testament and the New, that "all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men."⁴ It was by faith moreover that Rahab found salvation. And the same door is opened for the vile and abandoned of whom we have just spoken; in casting themselves on God's mercy they shall assuredly find life. But let us remember that there is no other way of safety, no other door of hope. We may not say, our lives have been blameless and irreproachable, we cannot stoop to accept salvation on the same terms with thieves and harlots. If we are blinded by this fatal deceit, those whom we despise shall leave us behind, and press into that inheritance of which we shall eternally come short

¹ James ii. 14.² Joshua xi. 20.³ I Corinthians vi. 9—11.⁴ Matthew xii. 31.

Let us remember the warning of our blessed Lord. "The publicans and the harlots," he said to the self-righteous of his day, "go into the kingdom of God before you. For John came unto you in the way of righteousness, and ye believed him not: but the publicans and the harlots believed him."¹ The Baptist to whom he refers, had preached the forgiveness of sin; but the moral and religious had scornfully refused his message, whilst the reprobate and abandoned had received it. Now the same message is declared to us, for the word of the Baptist was "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ."² And if we have been taught by the blessed Spirit to discern the Divine purity, and to discern in contrast with it, our sinful and corrupt condition, we shall not waste the precious time in comparing ourselves with others. Too thankful that the door of mercy by which Rahab and the thief entered is still open, we shall make haste to flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us. May the Lord in his infinite goodness, teach this humbling lesson to us all!

¹ Matthew xxi. 31, 32.

² Mark i. 1.

LECTURE XIX.

Hebrews xi. 32—35.

"And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again."

HAVING referred, as we saw in the last lecture, to the conquest of Canaan, St. Paul proceeds now to remind the Hebrews of the great and worthy deeds which had been done by their valiant fathers, in the land thus conquered by their arms. He does not indeed, as in the preceding parts of the chapter, dwell minutely on any particular case; his reference is general and hasty; time, he says, would fail him to do otherwise. In this we shall follow his example, contenting ourselves with a general and hasty glance at the history of the believing men whose names are mentioned in these verses. For what is true of the writer of Scripture, is still more true of its expositor. To dwell minutely on every thing which deserves his attention, would be to spend a life-time in expounding a single book.

The most hasty glance however at the lives and actions of these famous men, is sufficient to reveal faith to us in its true character, unhesitating confidence in God; in its noble result, unshrinking obedience to his will; and in its blessed

reward, the abundant fulfilment of his promises. Having gathered this instruction from the text, we shall then consider its application.

BARAK is the first of these worthies in the order of Scripture-narrative. Israel "served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders that outlived Joshua." But another generation then arose "which knew not the Lord," and Israel began to mingle with the heathen and to learn their works. They were subjected in consequence, first to the king of Mesopotamia and afterwards to the king of Moab; and when both chastisements had failed to bring them to abiding repentance, they were delivered into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who oppressed them for twenty years. Effectual resistance to this tyrant seemed impossible, for he had nine hundred chariots of iron, and he disarmed Israel that they might be helpless in his hands. The Lord however had pity on his heritage. But when his help came, it was to faith and not to sense; He spake a word of promise and command, and that word was by the mouth of a woman. "Hath not the Lord God of Israel commanded" said Deborah the prophetess to Barak, "Draw toward Mount Tabor, and take with thee ten thousand men;...and I will draw unto thee, to the river Kishon Sisera, the captain of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude; and I will deliver him into thine hand." Barak shrunk at first from the perilous task imposed on him. But though fearful, he was not unbelieving; he accepted the reproof of Deborah, and encouraged by her presence, obeyed God's word in her mouth. Intelligence of his having done so was no sooner carried to Sisera than he came down with the swoop of an eagle, thinking at once to destroy him. But God's enemies often calculate amiss. The faith which had strengthened Barak to hazard his life and to do the will of God in such trying circumstances, met in God's righteousness, with its due reward. "The Lord discomfited Sisera, and all his chariots, and all his host" before him, so that "Sisera fled away on his feet," and not a man of his vast army was left to him. And this was only the beginning of triumphs.

Victory followed victory; "the hand of Israel prospered, and prevailed" till their heathen oppressor was destroyed. Barak is thus an example of the words before us. "Through faith" he "obtained promises," was "out of weakness made strong, waxed valiant in fight," and "turned to flight the armies of the aliens."¹

The case of GIDEON which comes next in order, resembles in some respects that which we have just considered. Israel after Barak's death, began again to serve strange gods, and were delivered for seven years into the hand of Midian. Gideon the member of a poor family in Manasseh, and the least in his father's house, was commanded by God to deliver his country from oppression. "Surely I will be with thee" was the word addressed to him, "and thou shalt smite the Midianites as one man." He would fain, like Barak before him, have declined the perilous honour; for there was no human probability that this promise should be fulfilled. The army of Israel amounted only to two and thirty thousand men; whilst that of their oppressors exceeded an hundred thousand. But the words of the Lord by degrees inspired him with courage, so that he took the field. His trial however was yet to come; the Lord seeing that he had faith, began to put it to the test. Two and twenty thousand men were therefore sent to their homes, and ten thousand only remained with him; and these ten thousand were reduced, in their turn, to three hundred. But Gideon was now insensible to fear. Instructed by the Lord he put an empty pitcher, a lamp and trumpet into the hands of every soldier in his little army, and surrounded the camp of Midian in the middle watch of the night. Surely there is nothing which God commands, which faith will not encourage us to do! Here we have a Jewish peasant strengthened only by the assurance "I WILL BE WITH THEE," surrounding with three hundred men the camp of an armed foe who "lay along in the valley like grasshoppers for multitude!" His little band moreover participated in their leader's confidence; at his appointed signal they brake the pitchers, blew the trumpets,

¹ Judges iv. v.

held the lamps aloft, and shouted "The sword of the Lord, and of Gideon." Man's faith had now done its uttermost; the rest depended on the Lord. And he was not wanting to those who confided in him, "ALL THE HOST RAN, AND CRIED, AND FLED." The only task now left to Gideon, was to give chase to a flying foe; and Israel inspired with hope by his victory, seconded him vigorously in the work. Their oppressors were in consequence destroyed, and forty years of quietness were the reward of this act of faith.¹

JEPHTHAE, who comes next in order, is an example of the same thing. He also "obtained promises" and was "made strong" "through faith," so that he "waxed valiant in fight" and routed "the armies of the aliens." Israel having relapsed into idolatry some time after Gideon's death, were delivered into the hand of the Ammonites who oppressed them for eighteen years. Having called on the Lord for aid, the people appointed Jephthae their captain; and he "uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh," i.e. he made confession of his sin and weakness and implored the help of the Most High. And this faith did not go unrewarded; the Spirit of God descended on him, and strengthened from above, he went forth to meet the foe. That foe moreover was delivered into his hands; "he smote them from Aroer... to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter." And the final subjugation of the Ammonites was the fruit of this faith in God.²

We now come to one more remarkable than any who preceded him, the illustrious SAMSON. His history is replete with instruction, and a very full illustration of the text; we shall therefore dwell on it more at large. Unweaponed and unassisted he "stopped the mouths of lions;" by the valour of his single arm he overthrew embattled hosts; and having obtained the promise in his lifetime, that he should be Israel's deliverer from oppression, he was made strong out of weakness before his death to bring down signal vengeance on their foes. This superhuman strength, this terrible and

¹ Judges vi. vii.

² Judges x. xi.

resistless valour, this triumphant and glorious success, were moreover the fruit of faith; they were at once the result and the reward of confidence reposed on the Lord. The most hasty glance at his history will prove the truth of this account. While he was yet a youth, "a young lion roared against him" as he passed the vineyards of Timnath; but "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him," and unarmed and defenceless as he was, "he rent" the savage creature "as he would have rent a kid." It was not however to war with the beasts of the field that God had raised up Samson. The word had passed upon him before he was conceived in the womb, that hé should "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines;" for in further chastisement of their repeated idolatries, that heathen people had then dominion over them. An opportunity of fulfilling this ministry, was soon presented to heaven's selected champion. A private quarrel with the Philistines was the occasion, but it was ordered of the Lord; for his Spirit came upon his servant, so that he went down to their city Ashkelon and slew thirty of its people. It would have been a great exploit for any other Israelite to have done such a deed, singlehanded, in a Philistine city; for Samson it was nothing. He soon found an opportunity worthy of himself. He had smitten the Philistines "with a great slaughter," and the men of Judah alarmed for their own safety, sought to pacify their oppressors by delivering him bound into their hands. But "the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him," the two new cords with which his arms were fastened, became "as flax that was burnt with fire," and his bands dropped powerless. Their terrible captive was thus at liberty, and it was too late for the Philistines to flee. He snatched with his liberated right hand "the new jawbone of an ass," and with no other weapon of offence he slew a thousand men. And this exploit, amazing as it was, is but a sample of the feats of valour which made Samson for twenty years, at once the terror of the heathen, and the protector and defence of Israel. Nor is it difficult to shew that all this was the fruit of faith. It has been already

pointed out that the superhuman strength with which he was endowed, was the subject of promise to his mother before he was born into the world. This promise was obtained then "through faith" on the part of Samson; for it is to faith only that any promise of God is fulfilled. And we have other proofs that it was so. Every exploit of Samson is expressly referred, as we have seen, to the power of the Spirit of God; and faith only can avail itself of the strength which descends from above. The termination moreover of Samson's glorious career, affords mournful testimony to the same thing. God had connected his triumphs with the observance of his Nazarite vow; but forgetting to whom he was indebted, Samson lightly and presumptuously brake it. He imagined that his strength was his own, and thought that it must needs continue. But in this he was fearfully mistaken; he had ceased to make the Lord his confidence, and "the Lord departed from him;" he became as another man. The Philistines were not slow to avail themselves of this advantage; they "took him, and put out his eyes," and having bound him with fetters of brass, made him "grind in the prison-house" of Gaza. Ah, when they did these cruel things to him, where was that arm which had slain a thousand men? It hung powerless by his side; its strength had departed with departing faith. The mighty one was now laid low, his glory was turned to shame, the strength of Israel was become weakness, and was the sport of the uncircumcised! Well might we have said if we had seen him in these altered circumstances,—

"Can this be he,
That heroic, that renowned.
Irresistible Samson,
Whom unarmed
No strength of man nor fiercest wild beast could withstand;
Who rent the lion as the lion tears the kid,
Ran on embattled armies clad in iron,
And weaponless himself
Made arms ridiculous?"

We have still further evidence moreover, that faith had been the secret of his strength : God did not leave him in the dust. Samson sought his face in the darkness of his heathen prison, and in answer to returning faith, "out of weakness was made strong" once more. The lords of the Philistines, on a day of sacrifice to Dagon, called for their Jewish captive to make sport before them. The house of Dagon "was full of men and women," and all the nobility of that heathen land were there ; there were besides on the roof about three thousand persons, spectators of Samson's shame. But he, the blind object of their derision, called on the name of the Lord, and laid hold ; as he did so, with his right hand and with his left, of the two middle pillars on which the house was resting. We know the sequel ;—

"These two massy pillars
With horrible convulsion to and fro
He tugged, he shook, till down they came and drew
The whole roof after them, with burst of thunder,
Upon the heads of all who sat beneath—
Lords, ladies, captains, councillors, and priests."

Thus did the blind and helpless captive of Gaza, transformed by faith once more into the mighty Samson, avenge himself on the Philistines for his two eyes. It was his last exploit : he pulled down on his own head the ruin which overwhelmed them. But he died as he had lived, the destroyer of Israel's enemies through faith in Israel's God.¹

As we follow the course of Scripture-history, we come next to the name of SAMUEL. He was no warrior : he "turned to flight the armies of the aliens" by the power of faith alone. As he was judging Israel in Mizpeh, the Philistines came up against them. The people were afraid and cried to Samuel, and Samuel cried to the Lord. And the Lord in answer to the prayer of his servant, discomfited the Philistines with his thunder out of heaven, so that "they were smitten before Israel." This victory also quelled the spirit of that heathen nation, for "they came no more into the

¹ Judges xiii. xiv. xv. xvi.

coast of Israel...all the days of Samuel." And it was commemorated as the victory of faith: "Samuel took a stone, and set it between Mizpeh and Shen, and called it" the stone of help, "saying, Hitherto hath the Lord helped us." This happened, let me observe, not long after the death of Samson. God thus shewed to Israel that it mattered nothing to her safety whether that mighty one or the peaceful Samuel was her judge; that as long as there was faith to confide in him, and a true heart to call upon his name, so long he would surely be found the Strength and Defence of his people. But if we would see the text exemplified in this man of God we must look at him in another aspect. St. Paul says of this believing company that they "wrought righteousness." This was eminently true of Samuel: nothing evil is recorded of him; from childhood to grey hairs he did God's will. His life as Judge in Israel especially, is one bright and glorious display of righteousness. Let us hear his own account of it, rendered in his old age to the tribes of Israel when they were assembled before the Lord. "Witness against me" was his solemn protestation, "whose ox have I taken? or whose ass have I taken? or whom have I defrauded? whom have I oppressed? or of whose hand have I received any bribe to blind mine eyes therewith? and I will restore it you." The people gladly and cheerfully bore testimony, "Thou hast not defrauded us, nor oppressed us, neither hast thou taken ought of any man's hand." And Samuel said, "The Lord is witness;" and they answered, "He is witness." It requires no proof that this righteousness was the fruit of faith. We have seen this already in Enoch and Noah; in Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; all righteousness since the fall, has been the fruit of faith only.¹

We come next to the name of DAVID. The history of this illustrious man exemplifies almost every thing recorded in the text. We find him at one time, "out of weakness made strong," waxing "valiant in fight," and turning "to flight the armies of the aliens;" at another, escaping the

¹ 1 Samuel vii. 3—17. xii. 1—5.

edge of the sword and obtaining promises; and at another still, subduing kingdoms and working righteousness. A character is stamped moreover on these exploits, successes, and triumphs, which marks them as the fruit of faith. Let us take a rapid glance at his glorious career: it will furnish us with an illustration of every particular now mentioned concerning him. David was a youth of three and twenty years, when he went out to meet the veteran Goliath. The gigantic Philistine was clad in armour, a shield was borne before him, and the staff of his spear was like a weaver's beam. His juvenile adversary was attired as a shepherd-boy, and had no weapon of offence save only a stone and sling. But his hope was in the Lord; "I come to thee" he said to the Philistine, "in the name of the Lord of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom thou hast defied." Nor was this confidence unrecompensed: a stone of the brook slung by the hand of faith, gave Goliath "his death's-wound." And his youthful conqueror, taking advantage of the dismay occasioned by their champion's fall, overthrew the Philistines and chased them to the gates of their own cities.¹ But all human glory and triumph has also its alloy. Saul the king of Israel had, before this time, been virtually deprived of his kingdom, for God had told him by Samuel that he would set up another in his room. Samuel had also secretly anointed David, and the shepherd-youth had already the promise of the kingdom. The joy of Israel on the occasion of his achievement, suggested this thought to Saul, and he eyed him in consequence, with murderous jealousy "from that day and forward." It soon broke forth in open violence, and David saved himself only by flight. But "jealousy is cruel as the grave;" Saul chased him for seven long years, like a partridge on the mountains. It seemed impossible at last that David should escape any longer from the sleepless and untiring malice which thirsted for his blood. He was brought so low that he sought shelter, first with the Moabites and then with the Philistines; nay, he was brought lower still, for his own soldiers "spake of stoning him." But

¹ I Samuel xvii.

though tried as with fire, his faith never failed him; "David encouraged himself in the Lord his God." "Why art thou cast down, O my soul?" he said, "and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope in God: for I shall yet praise him."¹ And this faith received its due reward. He was preserved by him in whom he believed, from daily-impending destruction; "Saul sought him every day, but God delivered him not into his hand." And besides thus escaping the edge of Saul's sword, he obtained at length the promise of his vacant throne. Saul went down into battle and perished, and David became king of Israel.* He now turned his arms as Captain of the Lord's people against Syria, against Moab, against Ammon, Amalek, and Edom, and subdued these kingdoms in succession. And it was faith and not ambition which strengthened him for these exploits. He was guided in his warlike enterprises by the counsel and direction of God's oracle; he also dedicated to the Lord the spoils of the vanquished nations, acknowledging that to his all-powerful blessing he owed his great name and his extended sway. God himself reminded him of this. "I took thee from the sheep cote," he said, "and I was with thee whithersoever thou wentest, and have cut off all thine enemies,...and have made thee a great name."² And Solomon devoutly acknowledged that "the Lord put" the enemies of his father "under the soles of his feet."³ And besides subduing the kingdoms of his neighbours, David "wrought righteousness" among the people entrusted to his own care. He wrought it toward God by destroying idolatry and making provision for his holy worship, he wrought it toward man by causing judgment and justice to be executed in the land. We have also a mournful proof, as in the case of Samson, that this righteousness was the fruit of faith. The man after God's own heart, shewed before the close of his career, that he was capable when left alone, of committing the foulest wickedness. He coveted and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite, and then sought to cover his shame by slaying the dishonoured

¹ Psalm xliii. 5. * I Samuel xix. to xxxi. II Samuel i. to v. 3.

² II Samuel vii. 8, 9.

³ I Kings v. 3.

husband with the sword of the children of Ammon! We cannot contemplate this grievous exhibition without reading in it the truth of the text; if David at other times was found working righteousness, it was surely not of David but of the grace of God which was with him.¹

We come next to THE PROPHETS, the final reference of the text. St. Paul mentions no names, but the careful reader of Scripture will at once discover that ELIJAH, ELISHA, and DANIEL were especially in his eye. For he speaks of quenching the violence of fire and of women receiving their dead again; miraculous circumstances which are not recorded, save during the ministries of these famous men of God. Their histories are an illustration also of other things referred to in the text. Let us glance at them in succession.

David and Solomon were in due time gathered to their fathers, and the ten tribes of Israel, breaking off from the kingdom of Judah, made Jeroboam the son of Nebat, king. His history and that of the monarchs who succeeded him, is a tale of sin, violence, and blood. After the destruction of his house and of that of Baasha which came after it, Omri was exalted to the throne. Ahab his son "did worse than all that were before him;" not satisfied with the golden calves at Dan and Bethel, he introduced openly the worship of Baal. In this time of fearful apostacy God raised up ELIJAH. His work was to shut up the heavens that there should be no rain upon apostate Israel, to slay the priests of Baal, and to warn an idolatrous king and people of the coming judgments of the Lord. He set his face like a flint to these appointed tasks, and braved, in doing so, the vengeance both of prince and people; he did not fear the wrath of man, and sought only to do the will of God. In all this we meet with the text, "Who through faith, wrought righteousness;" for the will of God is righteousness. We find him also obtaining through faith the fulfilment of the promise of miraculous sustenance, first from the bills of the ravens at the brook Cherith, and then from the hands of the Gentile widow. We find him, on more than one occasion, escaping

¹ II Samuel xi. I Corinthians xv. 10.

the edge of the sword. Ahab was so enraged because of the dearth that he sought him through all the neighbouring kingdoms, and Jezebel did her utmost to avenge her slaughtered priests; but Jehovah hid his servant. We find him made strong out of weakness; the Lord sent an angel to feed him in the wilderness, and he "went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God." And finally, we meet with the circumstance which is especially recorded in the text. The Lord having struck with death the son of his Gentile hostess, Elijah took the dead child out of her bosom and cried to God on his behalf. His faith prevailed; the child revived in his arms, and he was able to say to the joyful mother, "See, thy son liveth."¹

ELISHA was the disciple of Elijah. His ministry is chiefly remarkable from his obtaining the promise of a double portion of his master's spirit. It was distinguished in consequence, by signs and wonders such as no servant of God had exhibited before him; nor did any exhibit them after him till Christ himself appeared. He commanded nature, for he parted the Jordan with his mantle and healed the waters of Jericho; he also healed the poisonous pottage, and multiplied the widow's oil. He restored from the loathsome leprosy and from the cold embrace of death. The case of Naaman the Syrian remains on record, in memorial of the one achievement; whilst the prophet's Shunammite hostess receiving from his hand her dead son raised to life again, illustrates the text and exemplifies the other. And that mighty power of God to heal and save, which was exercised by Elisha living, lingered even round his cold remains. We read that some time after he had been dead and buried, a company of mourners disturbed in their funeral-solemnities, cast a dead man into his sepulchre, and that when the lifeless body "touched the bones of Elisha," the man "revived, and stood up on his feet." What a signal honour did God thus put on faith WHEN HE GAVE TO HIS DEAD SERVANT THE POWER OF DESTROYING DEATH!²

¹ I Kings xvii. to xxi.

² II Kings ii. to ix. xiii. 20, 21.

But notwithstanding the miraculous ministry and the warnings of these watchmen of Ephraim, the ten tribes of Israel went deeper into apostacy, and were at length carried by the Assyrians into a captivity from which they have not yet returned. And their brethren of Judah taking no heed to avoid their sins, were, about an hundred and sixty years afterwards, carried captive to Babylon. Among these children of the captivity was DANIEL found, and with him were associated SHADRACH, MESHACH, and ABEDNEGO. These four were banded together in holy friendship; they had understanding together of the secret things of God; they were witnesses together for his holy name in a land of sin and idolatry. They also found favour in the eyes of the Chaldean despot, and were promoted together over the province of Babylon. But this tranquillity was not to last. It pleased Nebuchadnezzar to set up an image of gold, and to command all his subjects to fall down and worship it, on pain of being cast into a burning fiery furnace. Daniel's three friends refused to obey this mandate. "Our God whom we serve," they said, "is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king." Here we have faith in its true character, confidence in God; we have also its necessary result, determination not to disobey him. And this faith was put to the proof, it was literally tried with fire. The despot's cruel threatening was executed, they were cast into the burning flame. But confidence in a faithful God received its due reward, it "quenched the violence of the fire." The Redeemer himself vouchsafed his presence with them and commanded that terrible element not to harm his people. "Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire," was the exclamation of the astonished king, "and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like THE SON OF GOD." They came forth in his sight and in the sight of his princes and counsellors, and an hair of their heads was not found singed, "neither were their coats changed, nor the smell of fire had passed on them." So that their persecutor himself acknowledged the wondrous

power of faith; "God hath sent his angel" he said, "and delivered his servants that trusted in him." We have another illustration of the text in the eventful history of Daniel. Darius the Mede had taken the kingdom of Babylon, and at the instigation of Daniel's enemies, had issued a decree that whosoever should pray to any save only to himself, should be cast into the den of lions. Daniel deliberately disobeyed this royal mandate; he had faith in God and could not cease to worship him. This faith was put to the proof; he was cast into the den, and abode with its savage tenants for the space of a whole night. But it received its due recompense; it stopped the lions' mouths, and he came forth unharmed in the morning. "My God" he said to the king, "hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me;" and Darius echoing the confession, published through all his kingdom that the God in whom Daniel believed, had delivered him "from the power of the lions." Two of Babylon's heathen monarchs became thus the astonished witnesses of the power and excellency of faith.¹

WE learn from the glorious things which this subject has brought under our consideration, that there is nothing which faith cannot do. It can command the elements of nature; quenching the fire and parting the waters; it can command also the savage tenants of the wilderness, taming or rending them at its will. It can contend successfully with the most fearful odds, strengthening one against a thousand and enabling two to put ten thousand to flight. It can surmount the most appalling difficulties; it can protect from the most imminent dangers; it can enable for the most trying circumstances; it can obtain the most unlikely promises. There is indeed nothing, I repeat, which it cannot do; it can even raise the dead. "IF THOU CANST BELIEVE," said our Lord Jesus, "ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE TO HIM THAT BELLEVETH."² Oh what consolation must this have ministered to the tossed, troubled, and afflicted Hebrews! Difficulties of every kind were now surrounding them; but the lesson of this glorious scripture was "Fear

¹ Daniel i. to xli. vi.

² Mark ix. 23.

not, believe only;" "Who art thou, oh great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain."¹ And though we are not struggling with their difficulties, it is full of consolation for us also. We are prone to think that the promises of the gospel, forgiveness of sin, resurrection to life, and glory with Christ for ever, are too vast and magnificent to be obtained by faith only. We do wrong to think so. Faith can obtain whatever God has promised. He cannot deny himself, and all things therefore are attainable, yea are certain of being attained by the man who believes his word. The same faith will enable us to triumph over the devil, to overcome the world, to contend successfully against every spiritual adversary, and will bring us safe at last to that inheritance from which it has taught us to look.

And there is another lesson which we may learn from this precious scripture. There is a tendency in human nature to self-confidence as well as to despondency. Were we placed in the position of Barak, Gideon, Jephthae, Samson, or David; were we commanded, as they were, to subdue powerful kingdoms and to overthrow hosts of warlike enemies, we should readily acknowledge that we were unequal to the task. Were we sentenced with the brethren of Daniel, to be cast into a fiery furnace, or with Daniel himself, into a den of lions, we should readily acknowledge that we had no hope of coming forth unharmed. We should therefore make haste, in such circumstances, to lay hold on the help of the Lord. But many of us see no call for doing so, that we may be enabled to serve God and to obtain his promise of salvation. And yet St. Paul in the text, enumerates all these together, recording them alike as the fruit of faith in God. To work righteousness and to obtain promises is then as truly beyond the strength of unaided nature, as it is to quench the violence of fire or to stop the lion's mouth. We were baptized in the name of the Father and the Son, in token of God's eternal mercy and of our lasting obligations to his love. But we were baptized also in the name of the Holy Ghost, to teach us the humbling lesson that the

¹ Zechariah iv. 7.

promises of this mercy can be obtained, and our obligations to this love discharged, by the grace of the Spirit only. Let us open our hearts then to the blessed Comforter, that teaching us now to know the Lord, and guiding our feet in his holy paths, he may bring us at last to his heavenly kingdom. And let us learn from this subject, to keep the narrow way, neither falling into presumption on the one hand nor into despondency on the other. Jesus has warned us that few find this way.¹ Let us therefore strive to find it; its end is everlasting life.

¹ Matthew vii. 14.

LECTURE XX.

Hebrews xi. 35—38.

“ And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance ; that they might obtain a better resurrection : and others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment : they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword : they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins ; being destitute, afflicted, tormented ; (of whom the world was not worthy :) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.”

THE Hebrews have just been reminded of the great things which faith has done : they are reminded now of the fearful sufferings which it has been able to endure. And these sufferings teach the same lesson with the noble deeds referred to in the last lecture. They exhibit faith in its true character, confidence in the Divine promises ; and point to its unfailing result, cheerful compliance with his will.

And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance ; that they might obtain a better resurrection.

The circumstance here alluded to, is recorded, not in Scripture-history but in the second book of Maccabees. It stamps no canonical authority on that document that St. Paul should thus refer to it ; it proves merely that he considered it to contain a true account of events which had happened in Israel. After the last of their inspired prophets

had delivered his message, and the canon of Scripture was closed, there arose a king over Syria, Antiochus Epiphanes by name, who wasted God's heritage and inflicted the most dreadful sufferings on his people, endeavouring by the force of torture to make them forsake the God of their fathers and violate his law. A widow and her seven sons, were brought before him and commanded to eat swine's flesh. They refused and were tortured for their refusal. Steel and fire were the instruments of that torture, and were employed against them in every way in which these dreadful agents can afflict the human frame. We saw in the last lecture, that faith can quench the violence of fire. But it can also, if such is God's will, enable us to endure that violence. He was glorified in the former of these ways, in the brethren of Daniel who were seen in the midst of the fire, without harm: he was glorified in the latter, in this widow and her seven sons, who were seen in the midst of fiery torments, remaining faithful still. The circumstance mentioned in the text, renders their constancy more remarkable. They might have had deliverance if they would have accepted it at the price of disobedience to God. The tyrant pressed on one of them in particular, the offer not of escape from torture merely, but of wealth, honour, and power. But the noble youth refused the gilded bait, and his six brothers displayed equal constancy. And their widowed mother, having seen her seven sons sink successively under the violence of the fire, yielded herself a willing victim and died along with them.

The text declares that this heroism was the result of faith: these sufferers refused to accept "deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection." It has been made a question what St. Paul means by these words, but if we compare them with those immediately preceding, there seems no difficulty. He has just told us that the dead children of the widow of Zarephath and of the Shunammite lady, obtained a resurrection to life from the hands of Elijah and Elisha. And he now means to tell us that this widow and her sons looked for a resurrection better than theirs, a resurrection not to this present mortal life revived, but to that life over which death

has no more power for ever. We have already seen that the Divine promise of resurrection from the grave and eternal life, was an object of faith to the fathers of old; and it was handed down from them through the successive generations of their children. The Pharisees maintained it in the days of Christ and his apostles, against the infidel and lascivious Sadducees;¹ and St. Paul declared it before Agrippa, as the hope of the whole Hebrew nation.* It need not therefore surprise us to find these sufferers animated with this hope: they had learnt it, in common with the rest of their nation, from Moses and the prophets. Their tragical and heroic death looked at in this light, presents faith to us, according to St. Paul's definition, as "the substance of things hoped for." That must have imparted a substantial character indeed to the future, which gave strength to endure such extremity of present torment. It presents faith to us also in its genuine results. We see them acquiescing in the Divine will, cheerfully consenting, since he was not pleased to deliver them, to glorify him in suffering, torture, and death.

The text proceeds:—

And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment: they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword.

If we examined the details of the dreadful persecution to which reference has now been made, we should doubtless find much to which the words before us might be understood as relating. Mocking and scourging, bonds and imprisonment, the bruising stones and murderous sword, were freely employed by Antiochus in his rage against the Jews; and God's faithful ones "were tempted" by means of these horrible severities, to forsake the profession of his name. But there is no occasion to go into these details; for though the first part of the text proves that St. Paul had that persecution in his eye, his words must not be understood as

¹ Acts xxiii. 6—8.

* Acts xxvi. 6—8.

referring to it only. There is enough in the history of apostate Israel and backsliding Judah in days long prior to those of the Syrian king, to furnish us, alas, with abundant illustration of the text. Elijah complained to the Lord in his day, "The children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away."¹ The inspired penman, writing in the days of the Babylonish captivity, characterizes the conduct of Judah in almost the same terms. "They mocked the messengers of God" he says, "and despised his words, and misused his prophets, until the wrath of the Lord arose against his people, till there was no remedy."² And our blessed Lord himself gives fearful corroboration to this testimony. His language is full at once of severity and of tenderness; and both the severity and the tenderness tell the same mournful tale. "It cannot be" he exclaims with indignation, "that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." And then filled with that Divine pity which made him weep over her coming calamities, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem," he continues, "which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee; how often would I have gathered thy children together, ...and ye would not!"³ So truly was this the character of Israel and Judah that those who bore God's message to them, became proverbial in after ages for the sufferings through which they passed. "Take, my brethren, the prophets" says St. James, "who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience: behold, we count them happy which endure."⁴ Let us just glance then at the history of these evil days in so far as it elucidates the particulars mentioned in the text.

The histories of the prophets Elisha and Jeremiah furnish us with examples of "cruel mockings." As Elisha was returning from the rapture of his master and on his way to Bethel, "there came forth little children out of the city, and mocked him, and said unto him, Go up, thou bald head; go up,

¹ I Kings xix. 10.

² Luke xlii. 33, 34.

³ II Chronicles xxxvi. 16.

⁴ James v. 10.

thou bald head." The venom of impious contempt of God was in this mockery. Elijah had just gone up to heaven in a chariot and horses of fire, and it is only too plain that these ungodly children meant to say, follow your master, you baldhead, go up to heaven after him. But surely, it may be said, such a man as Elisha was not to be moved by the mockery of children! This is not the way to look at the matter; we speak in childhood, as we are accustomed to hear. God's glorious act in taking Elijah to himself must therefore have been a subject of jest in the homes of these unhappy children. They must have heard their fathers and mothers say, That prophet with the hairy mantle has gone, it seems, to heaven at last; we can well spare him, and could spare the baldhead who waited on him; may he soon follow his master! This is the explanation of their greeting Elisha as they did; and what a picture does it present to us of the spiritual state of the families of the covenant-people! And the picture is not overcharged; we read that the prophet turned round and cursed these profane little ones, and that "there came forth two she bears out of the wood, and tare forty and two" of them in pieces.¹ Had their language been the mere expression of the thoughtlessness and folly of childhood, it would not have been thus visited, for God is not causelessly severe. But it was the expression of the ungodliness of a people who despised both him and his servants. A man like Elisha dwelling among such a people, must have been subjected daily to contempt and derision; we are to regard the incident to which we have just referred, only as a sample of an experience which was continual. We may take another example of it. When he sent one of his disciples to anoint Jehu king over Israel, the captains of the host asked their comrade, "Wherefore came this mad fellow to thee?"² For this, alas, was the language of profane scorn in which his degenerate people spake of the servants of their God. Nor was this experience confined to Elisha: Jeremiah who prophesied two hundred years after him, in the declining days of Judah, is an example of the same thing. "I am in

¹ II Kings ii. 23, 24.² II Kings ix. 11.

derision daily," is his complaint, "every one mocketh me." And again, "The word of the Lord was made a reproach unto me, and a derision, daily." And again in still stronger language, "Behold their sitting down, and their rising up; I am their music."¹ This servant of God felt also most keenly the cruelty of these mockings. "Cursed be the day" he exclaims in passionate grief, "wherein I was born :... cursed be the man who brought tidings to my father, saying, A man-child is born unto thee... Wherefore came I forth out of the womb to see labour and sorrow, that my days should be consumed with shame?"²

This prophet had experience also of the next thing recorded in the text, of "scourgings, yea moreover, of bonds and imprisonment." "Pashur the son of Immer the priest, who was also chief governor in the house of the Lord," was so provoked by Jeremiah's faithful testimony that he "smote" him, "and put him in the stocks that were in the high gate of Benjamin, which was by the house of the Lord."³ And this shameful treatment from the man who sat in the seat of Moses and of Samuel, was only the first taste to Jeremiah, of the bitter cup. God's final judgment overtook his people shortly after this, for the king of Babylon besieged Jerusalem and took it. And the princes of Judah, while the enemy lay round their walls, regarding God's faithful servant as the author of his country's calamities, cast him into a dungeon, letting him down with cords. "And in the dungeon there was no water, but mire: so Jeremiah sunk in the mire." He would certainly have died in that dreary and noisome place, had not one of the king's eunuchs interceded for him and drawn him out. Though delivered however from the dungeon he was not set free, but remained in prison "until the day that Jerusalem was taken." The heathen Chaldeans then enlarged him, and by their kindness and gentle treatment, made him forget for a season, the cruelty of his own brethren.⁴

It was indeed for a season only, if Jewish tradition be

¹ Jeremiah xx. 7, 8. ² Lamentations iii. 63. ³ Jeremiah xx. 14, 15, 18.

⁴ Jeremiah xx. 1, 2.

⁵ Jeremiah xxxviii. xxxix.

correct. It relates the martyrdom of Jeremiah, telling us that he was stoned by his countrymen in Egypt, because he testified against their sins. We have thus in him a further exemplification of the text, "they were stoned." And Scripture-history so far bears out this tradition. It relates the treacherous murder of the Chaldean governor of Palestine, and tells us that the remnant of the Jews sought safety in consequence in Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them. It relates also how boldly and fearlessly he spake God's word to them in that land, and how grievously his faithfulness offended them.¹ But to pass from Jeremiah, Scripture-history has recorded a martyrdom by stoning in the days of Joash king of Judah. The king and his people had forsaken the God of their fathers, and prophet after prophet had testified against the wickedness in vain. "The Spirit of God came" at length on Zechariah the son of Jehoiada, so that he "stood above the people" and solemnly warned them of impending judgment. But "they conspired against him, and stoned him with stones at the commandment of the king," and "in the court of the house of the Lord."² Alas for David's house, that it should have been thus apostate! for the house of the Lord, that it should have been thus profaned!

The text proceeds, "They were sawn asunder." Immemorial tradition tells us that the prophet Isaiah, who sings so sweetly of Messiah's advent and of the glories of the New Testament-Church and of the kingdom, perished by this cruel death, by command of Manasseh king of Judah. The barbarous deed was worthy of the doer, of whom it is recorded with fearful emphasis that he "filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; which the Lord would not pardon."³ These words refer doubtless in part to God's illustrious prophet. His heavenly strains are to this hour, the comfort and refreshment of the Church; his blood was indeed the blood of innocence, and might well cry to heaven for vengeance.

Slaying with the sword, is another of the severities of the text. We have an example of this also in the days of

¹ Jeremiah xli. to xliv. ² II Chronicles xxiv. 17—22. ³ II Kings xxiv. 3, 4.

Jehoiakim king of Judah. There was a servant of God, Urijah by name, who prophesied against that monarch and his people, "according to all the words of Jeremiah." He fled into Egypt, when he had done so; but Jehoiakim sent after him, and took him and "slew him with the sword, and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people."¹ And we must remember that every case now cited, is only one among a multitude. When such monarchs as Manasseh and Jehoiakim sat on the throne of Judah, and the throne of Israel was occupied by kings like Ahab, who, aided by Jezebel his right hand of mischief, cut off the prophets of the Lord, it must have been so, in very deed. Many, too many to be reckoned up, must in these evil days, have been mocked and scourged, bound and imprisoned; many, in testifying against the wickedness which prevailed, must have been stoned for their faithful testimony, sawn asunder and slain with the sword. God's faithful servants, in the successive generations of Israel's history, "were tempted" by means of these severities, to forsake the profession of his name. But they were tempted in vain: he still reserved to himself a seed. Their innocent blood cried meanwhile to heaven for vengeance. And God at length hearkening to its cry, led the ten tribes of Israel captive to Assyria, and laid waste Judah and Jerusalem by the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon.

The text however enters yet further into detail, for it says of these righteous men,—

They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins; being destitute, afflicted, tormented; (of whom the world was not worthy:) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

The bare reading of these words brings the undaunted Elijah before us. His mark in Israel, was the hairy garment;² and many of kindred feelings with that man of God, must have been similarly appavelled in those days of

¹ Jeremiah xxvi. 20—23.

² II Kings i. 7. 8.

persecution and violence. They were "destitute" of means to procure more fitting raiment; "they wandered about," because they had no certain dwelling-place; they were "afflicted" and "tormented," for they were chased like a partridge on the mountains: "The world was not worthy" of their goodness; it knew not its inestimable worth. None of the ceiled houses of Israel were counted worthy to afford a shelter to Elijah's honoured head: nor were any of their possessors privileged to minister to Elijah's wants. God bade him shelter himself by the brook Cherith, and sent the ravens to him with bread and flesh; he assisted him to flee into the wilderness, and sent an angel to supply him with food. His servant, in the strength of that meat, walked for forty days and nights, not to the dwelling of some friendly Israelite, but to Horeb the mount of God; and when "he came thither, a cave" was the lodging which received him.¹ And it was with his fellows as with himself. When the idolatrous and bloody Jezebel "cut off the prophets of the Lord," Obadiah took an hundred prophets, and "hid them by fifty in a cave, and fed them with bread and water."² It is needless to proceed further. These historical details of the Old Testament abundantly illustrate the text.

St. Paul ascribes these heroic endurance to faith. We have already learnt that faith is "the evidence of things not seen" and "and the substance of things hoped for." And we are therefore to understand by this apostolic statement, that consciousness of the Divine presence, the consciousness of Moses when he saw him who is invisible, was the sacred principle which strengthened these sainted men. It was under its holy influence that they submitted patiently to this mockery, scourging, and imprisonment; that they consented to be thus stoned and sawn asunder. We must also understand by it that they looked for the glory which is yet to be revealed. For the hope of obtaining "a better resurrection" was not confined to the widow and her seven sons; it was common to all these noble sufferers, yea, it was deeply engraven on their hearts. And it reconciled them,

¹ 1 Kings xix. 1—9.

² 1 Kings xviii. 4.

as we learn from the text, to suffering, shame and death; it comforted and cheered them when they were driven from human society and wandered without other shelter than the cave and mountain-side.

Old Testament-Scripture in this particular, abundantly corroborates St. Paul. Let us take Jeremiah for an example. When God sent him to plead with his apostate people, he encouraged him not to fear, for "I have made thee" he said, "a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brazen walls against the whole land;...they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee." And this defence of iron and brass was simply his promised presence; "I AM WITH THEE, saith the Lord, to deliver thee."¹ Jeremiah accordingly, when ready to faint in the midst of abounding sorrow, when complaining of the defaming of many, and that fear was on every side, fell back on this assurance in the peaceful confidence of faith. "THE LORD IS WITH ME," he said; "my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail." And conscious only of the protection of the Invisible, and assured of its continuance, his afflicted spirit forgot its sorrows and poured itself forth in praise. "Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord," are his words: "for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evil-doers."² We remark in this language the genuine character of faith. The prophet was surrounded with enemies and in mortal peril every hour. But God had promised to deliver him; and faith confiding in the Divine veracity, speaks of that deliverance as if it were already vouchsafed. And if Jeremiah be an example of faith as "the evidence of things not seen," we find it in Isaiah, as "the substance of things hoped for." The promise of "a better resurrection," of a life over which death hath no power, is revealed with the utmost plainness, in the pages of his inspired prophecy. He tells us of the glorious day when death shall be swallowed up in victory; and then addressing the Church in the person of Messiah, he continues, "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust."³ How

¹ Jeremiah i. 17—19. ² Jeremiah xx. 10—13. ³ Isaiah xxv. 8.; xxvi. 19.

marvellous are these words ! Christ himself and his apostles have hardly spoken with greater clearness. We are reminded of the Saviour's declaration, " I am the resurrection, and the life ;"¹ and of the kindred declaration of St. Paul, " If Jesus died and rose again, them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."² We also remark again the genuine character of faith. The spirit of prophecy in the man of God overleaps intervening ages, and addresses the sleeping Church as if the counsel of God were accomplished and the time of awaking were come. Isaiah is equally distinct in his prophecy of the glories of that life to which the just shall thus awake. " Behold, a King" he tells us, " shall reign in righteousness, and princes shall rule in judgment....The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them....An highway shall be there,...and it shall be called The way of holiness...The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy."³ He tells us also concerning this " King of kings,"⁴ that " his name shall be called....the Prince of Peace ;" that " righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins ;" that under his holy government " they shall not hurt nor destroy...for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea."⁵ He prophesied these things for the consolation of the Church in his day and to the end of time. We cannot possibly doubt then that they comforted his own heart. Jeremiah was favoured with a vision of them in sleep, while the army of the Chaldees was lying round Jerusalem, and the glorious future swallowing up the dismal present ; " I awaked, and beheld ;" he says, " and my sleep was sweet unto me."⁶ It was surely the same with Isaiah in the evil days of Ahaz, and in the yet more evil days of Manasseh. He was constrained to complain of Judah, " Will ye weary my God also ?" But he knew that a day was coming when God should be wearied no longer, when the root of Jesse should stand for an ensign of the people, and " his rest" should be

¹ John xi. 25. ² I Thessalonians iv. 14. ³ Isaiah xxxii. 1. ; xxxv. 1, 8, 10.

⁴ Revelation xix. 16. ⁵ Isaiah ix. 6. ; xi. 5—9. ⁶ Jeremiah xxxi. 26.

glorious.¹ He saw altars built for all the host of heaven, innocent children burnt in the fire to Molech, carved images set up in the house of God, and Judah and Jerusalem seduced, till they exceeded even the heathen Canaanites in idolatry and crime.² But he knew that a day was coming when this wickedness should cease to exist; when God should no longer be dishonoured, when man should no longer be destroyed. He might have escaped the torturing saw, if he would have yielded to the current of his evil times and forgotten his obligations to God. But he rather chose to yield his body to that agony, to pour forth his life and to be numbered with the dead, because he believed that he should see God's goodness "in the land of the living,"³ when the tenants of the dust should at his bidding, "awake and sing." And as it was with these two holy prophets, so it must have been with Elisha, Zechariah, and Urijah; and with those also who in the days of cruel Ahab, found their dreary shelter in dens and caves of the earth. Believing that the Lord was with them, and looking for the recompense of his reward, they cheerfully endured for his sake, everything which malice could inflict.

THESE hallowed reminiscences were admirably calculated to sustain and comfort the hearts of the now afflicted Hebrews. They brought before them the worthies of their own nation contending with trials similar to their own, and triumphing over them by faith in God. They reminded them that the God of Abraham had been faithful to those who of old had endured for his sake; they gave the blessed assurance that he would be faithful to them also and would not suffer them to be tempted above that which they were able to bear. They reminded them moreover that in thus enduring, they had fellowship with the spirits of the just made perfect, suffering in that holy cause in which heaven-honoured Elijah had toiled and travailed, for which Isaiah and Jeremiah had shed their blood. Their enemies accused them of having forsaken the God of Abraham, and assigned that as the reason of their persecution. But the Apostle

¹ Isaiah vii. 13.; xi. 10. ² II Kings xxi. 1—9. ³ Psalms xxvii. 13.

reminded them that the very opposite was the truth; that the spirit which now persecuted the faithful disciples of Jesus, was the same which had inflicted these evil things on the prophets and righteous men that were before them.¹

This subject is full of instruction for us also. It teaches in the first place, as was already remarked, that as there is nothing on the one hand which faith cannot do, so there is nothing on the other which it is not able to endure. It can bear to be houseless, homeless, friendless; it can consent to hunger, thirst, cold, and nakedness; it can welcome shame and stripes, darkness and a dungeon. It can surrender what is dearest and most precious to nature: the mother, under its holy influence, could encourage her seven sons to the stake. It can embrace that at which nature shrinks the most: it enabled the same mother to look on her children's blackened ashes, and to yield herself, after them, to the fire. How fearful were the sufferings to which the words before us refer! And the fire, the stones, the steel, their dreadful instruments, were plied with the untiring zeal and cordial energy of hellish malice. But they were plied in vain: God's faithful ones believed and suffered. Take courage then against Satan, ye who now believe in the same holy name. If his utmost malice were let loose this moment, as your day is, your strength should be: he may as soon prevail against God as against the people who trust in God. The most distant glimpse of the glories of that day when the dead saints shall rise with their risen Head, when the now unconscious tenants of the dust shall awake and sing, is sufficient and more than sufficient to make all present affliction be disregarded. Oh that such faith were ours! Oh that our hearts were lifted by its holy influence above the perishing trifles of time, and filled with these Divine realities! We should be taught by it, in the present life, to act for God or suffer in his cause, according as his wisdom might appoint; we should be prepared, in the life to come, to join that company of faithful ones who surround the throne above.

¹ Matthew v. 12.

This precious Scripture teaches us in the second place, that what is esteemed of God is not therefore esteemed of man. We are forbidden to cast our pearls before swine, because they know not their value, and will "trample them under their feet."¹ Man has ever acted thus towards God's pearls, his precious saints; he has trampled them under his feet, not knowing their inestimable worth. The statements of the text are the proof of this heavy charge. Let no one therefore deceive himself: the spirit, temper, and behaviour which is stamped with the approbation of God, and secures for its possessor the esteem of those who fear God, will not necessarily secure the approbation of man. The circumcised in heart, as St. Paul assures us elsewhere, have "praise, not of men, but of God."² This, I am aware, is not pleasing doctrine. It is more pleasing to hear virtue eulogized, to be told that its beauty attracts all eyes, and wins the regard of every heart. But the question with the faithful minister is not what pleases, but what is according to God's holy word. "If perfect virtue were to appear on earth," was the eloquent declaration of a learned divine, "all men would fall down and worship it." "Perfect virtue once appeared on earth," was the solemn reply of another, "and men crucified it." And the Cross to which this appeal was made, testifies that he spoke the truth. Let us choose then whom we will serve. He who determines that at all hazards he will keep the world's favour, more than runs the risk of losing the favour of God. But he who determines on the other hand, that at whatever loss or sacrifice, he will abide God's faithful servant, shall obtain that favour and have it as his portion for ever. May the latter choice be that of every one of us! It is the choice of wisdom. And we may rest assured that we shall think so, when we look back on this world from the eternity which soon shall follow it.

¹ Matthew vii 6.² Romans ii. 29.

LECTURE XXI.

Hebrews xi. 39, 40.

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect."

THE contents of this wonderful chapter are summed up by the Apostle, in the words which we have just read. He has been reminding the Hebrews of the deeds and sufferings of God's believing people, from the days of Abel down almost to the first advent of the Saviour; and he now reminds them that though these worthies "obtained a good report," they did not receive the promised reward of glory. He assigns also a reason for this dealing on the part of God. Something better than was revealed in their days, was provided, he says, for this last dispensation of the world; and until that better thing should come, and we who should enjoy it, were ready to partake with them, their consummated felicity was necessarily delayed.

In entering on the consideration of this scripture, I feel constrained to pause. Its contents are so varied that I know not where to begin; they are so magnificent that I despair of being able to set them forth aright; they are so large and rich and full, that when I have begun, I shall not know where to end. May God grant to us his heavenly teaching, that we may comprehend something of their meaning!

And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise.

These words teach us plainly that God has annexed a twofold reward to faith, a good report now, and eternal glory hereafter. The righteous men to whom reference has just been made, have obtained as we have already seen, the former part of this reward; but St. Paul here declares that the latter yet waits to be conferred.

To obtain a good report, is to be well spoken of. Whose good report then did these men of God obtain? By whom were they well spoken of? This point was considered before, and a brief reference to it now will suffice. They did not obtain the approbation of mankind in general. "Art thou he that troubleth Israel?"¹ was the question of Ahab to Elijah; "This man is worthy to die"² was the sentence of the princes on Jeremiah. This was indeed compensated in part by the affection and esteem of the righteous, both for their persons and their memories. The name of martyred Abel was doubtless held in honour by every succeeding generation of those who feared God; Enoch and Noah could not fail to possess the reverential affection of their cotemporaries among the just, and the esteem of those who came after them. It must have been the same with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, with Joseph, Moses, and Joshua, with Samuel and David, with Elijah and Daniel, whilst they dwelt upon the earth. And their memories were held in honour by succeeding generations among God's people; nay they have come down with honour even to our own days. Is this then the "good report" of the text? Is this the present reward which God has annexed to faith? No, the meaning of the text is deeper; faith has a better reward than the good report of the holiest of mankind. It has the good report of Christ and the approbation of the Most High. I appeal in proof of this statement, to the apostolic discourse before us. The names, deeds, and sufferings of the worthies to whom it refers, are all recorded with honour in the page of inspiration. We are told of the faith of Abraham, of the self-sacrificing devotedness of Moses, of the piety of Samuel, of the zeal of David, and of the holy boldness of Elijah.

¹ 1 Kings xviii. 17. ² Jeremiah xxvi. 11.; xxxviii. 4.

And CHRIST is the writer of this record; it is HIS GOOD REPORT OF HIS FAITHFUL SERVANTS. This then is faith's present reward. For the good report which these righteous men obtained, is the heritage of all who believe. The canon of Scripture is indeed closed, and our names cannot be entered there. But every faithful servant of Christ has at this moment his memorial on high; his deeds and sufferings for God and righteousness are remembered and recorded above. "Him will I confess," is the promise of Jesus, "before my Father which is in heaven;" and again, "the Son of Man shall confess him before the angels of God."¹ Heaven's golden harps are silent, cherubim and seraphim are mute, and God the Father bends from his throne to listen. Oh what an encouragement is this to confess the Saviour on earth! We are oppressed, as we do so, by a sense of sin and a consciousness of miserable shortcoming; but let us not despond; the eye of Jesus is upon us, and he is now confessing us on high. The fulness of this glorious reward moreover is yet to come. When Christ shall take his seat as Judge, he shall confess the names of his people before assembled worlds, owning them as his friends and brethren; he shall also cause their enemies to come and worship before their feet and to know that he has loved them.* The blessedness of those whom he commends shall then also be made to appear. He shall say to them in that day of glory, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you."²

This leads us to consider the second part of faith's reward, the glory yet to be revealed which God has promised to his people. For approbation and recompense are indissolubly connected in the dealings of the Most High. A king appoints his son, the heir of his kingdom, to be the leader of his armies against the enemy. The sovereign's banner is unfurled, and every patriot flocks to it. But the service is arduous; there are laborious marches and hardly-contested fields; and those who would approve themselves, must not grudge their limbs, their blood, nay their lives in their

¹ Matthew x. 32. Luke xii. 8. ² Revelation iii. 5. 2. ³ Matthew xxv. 31, 34.

country's cause. The prince sends home his despatches as the campaign proceeds, making honourable mention of as many as distinguish themselves in the war. This is the present reward of these gallant soldiers; they are well-reported of to their sovereign, their fame is spread abroad, their names are mentioned with honour in their native country. But it is not their only reward. The war, after a time, is ended and the army returns home. Promotion, advancement, and wealth, with titles of honour and distinction, are then freely bestowed on merit. And it is the cheering hope of this consummation, in a country saved through his perils and blood, which reconciles the patriot-soldier to the fatigues and dangers of war. Privation, wounds, and hunger are cheerfully submitted to; difficulties are encountered with the daily chance of death: one thought of home and the rewards of a grateful country, makes all these evils be forgotten. Now this illustration from earthly things, though necessarily feeble, sets forth the truth of heavenly things. Christ the Son of God is the Captain of the host of his Father, and those who serve God are his soldiers. "Thou therefore endure hardness," writes St. Paul to Timothy, "as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."¹ The enemy is the devil; and under his banner of unrighteousness, bad angels and wicked men are ranged. Between these two leaders and their armies there has been war ever since Adam fell in Eden, and will be till the end come; the field has been long and fiercely contested, and is fiercely contested still. Christ meanwhile, as this scripture tells us, has had many gallant soldiers. There have been many in every age, who, putting on "the breastplate of righteousness," and "taking the shield of faith, . . . the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit,"² have faced danger and death in his cause without shrinking, have "resisted unto blood, striving against sin," have contended valiantly against Satan while they lived, and yielded up the contest only with their breath. They have already a reward, for their record is on high, their names, deeds, and sufferings are confessed above, their fame

¹ II Timothy ii. 3.² Ephesians vi. 14—17.

has been heard in heaven their native land. But they have another reward in prospect, when this long-protected war is over and blessed peace returns. Their victorious Prince shall then lead home his army, and remember in his royal munificence, his faithful soldiers. The promotion and honour which comes from above, the dignities and glories of the eternal kingdom, shall recompense then the toils and labours of earth; time's transitory sufferings shall be forgotten in the fulness of everlasting bliss.

Let us consider this subject more particularly. The final reward which God had promised to his people, and to which reference is made in the words before us, is the "better resurrection" which came under our notice in the last lecture. We learn from Isaiah, that this was the hope of the Old Testament-Church, for he addresses the dead saints in the spirit of prophecy, bidding them "awake and sing;" we learn from St Paul, that it is the hope of believers now. For he not only tells us that this mortal must put on immortality, and this corruptible, incorruption, but filled with the blessed contemplation, bursts forth in rapture, "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"¹ And both Isaiah and St. John declare that this resurrection shall be not to life only but to glory. Isaiah speaks of "the Lord of hosts" reigning "in Mount Zion and before his elders gloriously;"² and St. John declares that he beheld the enthroned Saviour with his enthroned elders sitting round him.³ He also declares expressly that those who have served God on earth, "shall reign for ever and ever;"⁴ he records their song of triumphant expectation, "We shall reign on the earth;"⁵ he ascribes in their name and his own, eternal glory "unto him who...hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father."⁶ These then are the rewards of glory which God has promised to the just. They shall be exalted with that Prince under whose banner they have fought, and for whom many of them have shed their blood. They shall abide with him as His friends in

¹ I Corinthians xv. 55.

² Isaiah xxiv. 23. Septuagint Version.

³ Revelation iv. 4. xxi. 5. v. 10.

⁴ Revelation i. 5, 6.

the royal city ; and when " the government shall be upon his shoulder,"¹ he shall entrust them as his confidential ministers, with the affairs of his boundless empire. Yea, they shall be set over the provinces of that empire, and be privileged to bless God's creatures by the exercise of righteous rule. And finally, they shall be channels of communication, as priests with the risen Christ, between the Almighty Father and the world which has been redeemed by the Son. Such is the honour which comes from God, such is the crown of glory which wisdom shall deliver to her children.* Noah, Abraham, Moses and their fellows lived and laboured for this blessed hope ; but they died without receiving it and have not yet received it.

Why have they not received it? Why is their felicity delayed? This question is answered in the concluding words of the text:—

God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

These words have occasioned very great difficulty, and there have been many conjectures as to their real meaning. It is surprising that this difficulty should exist ; St. Paul evidently means to tell us that our privileges are greater than those of Old Testament-believers, and that until these greater privileges had been really conferred, the consummated felicity of the whole Church was necessarily delayed. And a very moderate acquaintance with the gospel is surely sufficient to explain the meaning of this statement. In the days of Noah, Abraham, and Moses, the expiation of sin and destruction of death were mercies promised but not accomplished ; these saints looked forward to them in hope. These mercies are accomplished now in the cross and resurrection of Jesus ; we look back on them and give thanks to God. This is the " some better thing" which Divine goodness has " provided for us," on whom the ends of the world are come. And the perfection of the Old

¹ Isaiah ix. 6.

* Proverbs iv. 9.

Testament-saints was necessarily delayed till this better thing was given. We have seen already that during their earthly pilgrimage, they were not made perfect even "as pertaining to the conscience;" nay we have found reason to believe that until they heard in the disembodied state, of Christ's finished work, there was still a lingering hindrance to their perfected rest in God. And if the revelation of the better thing was needful even for that perfecting, how much more to their consummated felicity, to their being exalted to the rewards of glory! For these rewards required a body to enjoy them, as was shewn in the translation of Enoch and Elijah; a spirit could not be a king and priest to God. Resurrection therefore was necessary before they could be conferred, for the bodies of these saints were under the common sentence, "dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." But there could be no resurrection till death was abolished; death could not be abolished till the Saviour should rise; and the Saviour could not rise till he had expiated sin by his Cross. Nor was this all. The promise given to these believing men was that they should be glorified with Messiah. And this promise necessarily implied that he should be glorified first; it were a contradiction to speak of his elders reigning in Mount Zion, before he himself had assumed the royal seat. For these reasons of state then in the breast of the King of kings, the perfection was delayed till the better thing was revealed. Its revelation has perfected with us, the spirits of these just men; that accomplished sacrifice which is our peace on earth, is their peace also in the presence of God. It has also provided that they and we shall yet be perfected together; for it has expiated sin, it has abolished death, it has exalted the Saviour to his Father's throne. Nothing therefore now remains but that he should accomplish the number of his elect and bring in his promised kingdom. The saved shall then be gathered to him in one body, and in one body shall be glorified; righteous Abel and the last son of Adam who has been brought home to God, shall be seen together in resurrection-blessedness.

We are instructed by the words which we are now considering, how to think and speak of the cross and the kingdom of the Saviour. There is much misapprehension on this deeply-important subject. Many persons speak as if the cross were the perfect thing, and tell us that those who believe in it, pass through death immediately into consummated felicity. Let us bring this opinion to the test of the text. It calls the cross the "better thing." And it is so. It is better than the blood of bulls and goats and all the ceremonies of legal worship; they could not pacify the conscience, they could not cleanse the heart, they never could have taught us to call God our Father. But it is not the perfect thing; for that, as the language of the text implies, the saints of former dispensations with the departed saints of the present, are yet waiting in the bosom of God. When his name is hallowed, when his will is done on earth as now it is done in heaven, when Jesus reigns as King and the enemy is for ever crushed, then, and not till then, **THE PERFECT THING** is come; then, and not till then, the felicity of his people is consummated. We have abundant scriptural testimony to this most obvious truth. St. Peter tells us that "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead," we are begotten again to the living hope of "an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away." The Father has promised this inheritance both to Christ and his people; but neither he nor they are as yet put in possession, for its revelation is deferred, as the apostle adds expressly, till "the last time."¹ St. Paul in his epistle to the Ephesians, teaches the same doctrine. He says that the Holy Ghost "is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory."² The gift of the Holy Ghost is the fruit of Christ's passion, the blessed result of the "better thing" which God has provided for us. But we are told in the words just quoted that it is the pledge of something better still, even of the perfection. For the apostle declares that it is "the earnest" of the eternal "inheritance," till Christ shall redeem out

¹ I Peter i. 3—5.

² Ephesians i. 14.

of the hand of the devil that world which he has "purchased" with his blood, and take it as his kingdom, as a "possession" for himself and his people for ever. The language of St. John also throws great light on this matter, for he places the two, the better and the perfect thing, in contrast with each other. "We are now," he says, "the sons of God ;... and when he shall appear, we shall be like him." Whilst we prize the cross then, and rejoice greatly in the blood which there was shed, and look with adoring thankfulness to him who hung thereon, let us never think or speak as if the cross were all. It was the Saviour's path to glory, the glory in which he shall yet be revealed ; let us therefore expect that revelation, let us look for him as the crowned King. For this blessed hope God's oppressed creation waits, and all nature languishes till he appear.

When shall he appear then ? When shall the righteous now abiding in his bosom, be made perfect in felicity by the resurrection of their bodies from the grave ? On this point the text is silent. One thing however is implied in its statements. This glorious consummation may be brought in at any time ; no great event now intervenes to hinder it. It was quite otherwise under earlier dispensations. If we had asked Isaiah whether in fulfilment of his glorious prophecies, the son of David might be expected soon to assume the royal seat, the prophet would have answered, He has not yet come to make atonement for sin ; his coming as the crowned King must therefore be far away. The language of St. Peter is a most striking corroboration of this statement. He tells us that Isaiah and his fellows searched "what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow." He tells us also that in reply to this anxious investigation, "it was revealed" to them, "that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported" in the gospel.* These holy men understood then that sufferings were to precede the glory. They understood also that

* 1 John iii. 2

* 1 Peter i. 10—12.

another generation of the Church should yet arise, more privileged than they had been, and that the sufferings of which they were discoursing, should minister to those who should thus come after them, a peace and consolation which they themselves had never known. This is evidently the "better thing" of the text, and they foresaw its revelation before the perfect thing could come. But we cannot now put anything between us and the glorious final consummation. God's kingdom shall come when the number of his elect is accomplished, and none of us can tell the hour. We know this only, that it shall come as a snare upon a thoughtless world, and the wise in heart shall be prepared. "Therefore, my beloved brethren," says St. Paul, when he has set forth to the Corinthians and to us the glories of this final consummation, "be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord."¹ It is not in vain indeed, if it shall be repaid with such Divine munificence, if "this mortal shall put on immortality," and "this corruptible, incorruption," at his gracious and omnipotent word. Let us labour then as those who are animated by such a hope; it is our preparation for our expected Lord and Saviour.

THE considerations suggested by this subject were well suited, I need not remark, to the circumstances of those to whom St. Paul was writing. They have just been reminded by him of the deeds and sufferings of their fathers; they are reminded now that those who behaved so nobly and suffered so patiently, were possessed of privileges far inferior to theirs. We have a better assurance of God's love, he says, for Messiah has now come; a better pledge of his faithfulness, for that advent is the fulfilment of promises given since the world began; a better standing before him, for the veil is rent and we are now the sons of God; a better consolation, for we have a risen and ascended Mediator. They are now in the bosom of God, he adds, waiting for their consummation in bliss, when we and they shall be glorified together. Let us not faint then in our day of

¹ I Corinthians xv. 58.

adversity, lest we be ashamed to look them in the face in the coming day of the Lord. For they fainted not in their time of trouble, but nobly persevered to the end.

All this applies equally to us. Let us be stirred up then to follow the footsteps of these righteous men, treading after them the narrow way which leads to eternal life. Satan may remind us of their lives of trial, and of the deaths of agony and shame which were the lot of some of them; but let us be reminded by St. Paul of the abundant reward which has made all these things be forgotten. They have obtained God's good report, and are now cherishing in his bosom, the sure and blessed hope of everlasting glory. We have already seen that the true Christian is Christ's enrolled and enlisted soldier. Now there is nothing so dear to the soldier's heart as the good report of his general, nor is any thing so animating as the hope of that advancement which follows it. It makes him despise danger and brave death in their most appalling forms, he seeks

———"the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth."

Are we then Christians indeed? If we are, we shall have this heart in us, Christ's good report and the honour which comes from him shall be esteemed more precious than all the world beside. Such reputation is no bubble; blessed for ever and ever is the man whom he commends; undying is that man's honour, imperishable is his reward. But alas, there is a fearful lack of this spirit of devoted obedience to the Captain of the host of the Lord; and the children of this world in their generation, are the reproach of the children of light. We read of Isaiah being sawn asunder, of Jeremiah being stoned, of Urijah being slain with the sword; and surely they must have grudged, we say, to have submitted to such sufferings, and to have been made the victims of such cruel tyranny. Is such a thought worthy of the soldiers of Jesus Christ? Should we esteem him a true-hearted soldier who should speak thus of the loss of his

limbs, or of the death of any of his kindred, in the sacred cause of his king and native land. Let us suppose that we had met some British captain returning from that great victory, which forty years ago destroyed the gigantic oppressor of the nations and delivered Europe from twenty years of misery. Let us suppose that we had congratulated him on being present at that glorious triumph of our arms, and that he had answered us only with unmanly lamentations over a limb which he had lost in the encounter! In what light should we have regarded his complaints? We should have listened with contempt. Is this a time, we should have asked, when nations are holding jubilee, for you to lament over your losses? You are a dastard, unworthy of a soldier's name, unworthy to have lost a limb in such a field. And such language would have expressed the truth. The only care of the gallant soldier is not to turn his back to the foe; he esteems his wounds his distinction, and is contented, if he fall, to die a soldier's death and to be buried in a soldier's grave. This is most strikingly expressed in the language which the great poet of human nature puts into the mouth of a father, when tidings are brought to him that his son has fallen. "Had he his hurts before," is the parent's only question; and on being answered, "aye, on the front," he exclaims with passionate energy,—

" Had I as many sons as I have hairs,
I could not wish them to a fairer death."

Now this is the spirit which animates the good soldier of Jesus Christ, and which animated also the righteous men of whom we have spoken. When they were scourged and bound and imprisoned, they not only did not grudge these sufferings, but accounted every scar an honourable distinction; and when they died by cruel hands, they gave thanks to God that it was their privilege to fall on the field of glory. Their deaths were therefore precious in his sight; their very dust is dear to him, and shall, at his omnipotent bidding, yet awake and sing.

And if the good soldier does not grudge at any time, either his limbs or his life in his country's cause, far less does he grudge them when victory has crowned its arms. The consciousness that he has borne a part in the triumphs of a day of glory, makes all his pains be forgotten, and swells even the bosom of the dying with rapturous joy. This is brought strikingly before us in the poet's description of the expiring warrior,—

" With dying hand above his head
He shook the fragment of his blade,
And shouted, Victory ! "

This also was the case with these men of God. It was not "in the lost battle" that their blood was spilt. Assurance of final triumph was, on the contrary, their continual encouragement; they had the consolation of knowing that each one was bearing a part in the discomfiture of the common enemy; and when they fell, it was on the field of conscious victory. I need not remark that this is the case still. There can be no doubt of the final issue of the contest between God and Satan; Jesus must yet be victorious. Meanwhile we who follow this heavenly "leader and commander" are, each of us, bearing a part in hastening on this glorious consummation. Every duty done in obedience to Jesus, every pang endured for his name, contributes in its proportion, great or small, towards the final discomfiture of the common enemy. And he who acts or suffers in this holy cause, has the assurance now of the approbation of Christ, and the promise, another day, of the honours of the kingdom of God. Let us awake then and devote ourselves to the cause of our God and King. Those who know not his name, may esteem it enthusiasm thus to speak; but they are words of truth and soberness. And when the discoveries of eternity shall burst upon us, revealing the glory of the Saviour, and the greatness of the deliverance which he shall then have achieved for creation, from the grasp of the liar and murderer, their truth and sobriety shall be made abundantly

manifest. No one shall then look back and say, I have served Christ too faithfully; he whose life has been the longest and the most entirely devoted to his cause, shall rather wish that his earthly course could come again, that he might serve him as his love had deserved. But our present opportunities of service shall not return. May we therefore have grace, whilst they are continued with us, that we may use them for his glory!

See Appendix, Note Q.

LECTURE XXII.

Hebrews xii. 1.

"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us."

Having brought to a conclusion the heart-stirring discourse of the preceding chapter, St. Paul proceeds in the words which we have just read, to make practical application of its topics. But these words as they stand in our translation, do not convey the intensity of his meaning; there is indeed no meaning in the statement—"seeing we also are compassed about." If this apostolic sentence however is literally rendered from the original, the effect is very different. It will then read—

Wherefore LET US ALSO, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, run with patience the race that is set before us.

Nothing can be more evident than the meaning of these words; nor can any thing be more forcible than the exhortation which they contain. I have exhibited to you, the Apostle would say, the examples of God's servants from righteous Abel down almost to the advent of the Saviour, and have reminded you how patiently they both laboured and suffered for his sake. But I have not done so, merely to excite your admiration. Their faith, heroism, and constancy

are indeed to be admired ; but we must do more than admire them, we must follow their steps ; for we as well as they, have a God to serve, a race to run, and a crown of glory to win. Let this therefore be the lesson of their example, "let us also run with patience the race that is set before us."

We shall consider this subject in detail. Let us direct our attention, in the first place, to the encouragement which we derive, in running this heavenly race, from the "cloud of witnesses" which compass us about. This will lead us to inquire in the second place, how this race is to be run ; what is the meaning of "laying aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us ;" and why we have need of patience. And these things duly considered, will remind us in the third place, who has set this glorious race before us.

I. The word witness has two distinct meanings. It signifies a witness-bearer ; it signifies also a spectator. "I will give power unto my two witnesses" is the word of God by St. John ; thou "hast professed a good profession before many witnesses," is the word addressed to Timothy by St. Paul.¹ It is necessary to mark this that we may understand the words before us. For if the "cloud of witnesses" here mentioned, be taken simply to mean spectators, this apostolic sentence is deprived of the richness and fulness of its import. I have no hesitation in affixing both meanings to the word, and will now illustrate both.

Those here called "a cloud" are the saints and servants of God, belonging to all preceding dispensations ; such of them at least, as the Apostle has just referred to. The expression indicates their number ; they are "so great a cloud," that "time would fail me" says St. Paul, to recount their noble deeds ;² and the name "witnesses" declares their character. They bore, in life and in death, in joy and in sorrow, in prosperity and in adversity, one uniform, consistent, and unvarying witness for God's name. For the encouragement of those who should come after them, they testified with one voice what their histories still testify, viz. that they had made trial of him and of his service, and that they had

¹ Revelation xi. 3. ; I Timothy vi. 12.

² Hebrews xi. 32.

found him a loving, gracious and faithful Master. St. Paul is now exhorting the Hebrews to put their trust in the Lord, and to devote themselves to his blessed service, doing or bearing his will, as he in his wisdom might appoint. Nothing therefore could be more apposite than reference to this cloud of witnesses, to the glorious testimony which their fathers had borne on behalf of that faithful Master for whom he was claiming their confidence and obedience. Some one asks us to entrust our temporal concerns to his management; but we hesitate, because we suspect his integrity. He refers us therefore to all who have had dealings with him; let them, he says, bear witness for me. We accept his reference; and those to whom he has referred us, testify in his favour with one voice. They tell us that they have had much experience of him, and that they have found him, in every variety of circumstances, a man of probity and honour; they assure us that if we put our trust in him, we shall never repent having done so. We find in this testimony, the very satisfaction which we seek; our suspicion is gone, and we distrust the object of it no more. Now the heart that is in us all by nature, hesitates to trust in God. The Hebrews were thus hesitating; the long continuance of their trials had made them almost stand in doubt of his faithfulness, and they were beginning to repine at their sufferings for his sake. St. Paul says therefore in the text, **BEHOLD GOD'S WITNESSES!** Go to Abel, Enoch, and Noah, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to Joseph, Moses, and Joshua, to Samuel and David, to Elijah, Elisha, and Daniel, to Isaiah and Jeremiah; go and ask them **WHETHER GOD MAY BE TRUSTED OR NOT?** Their lives, their deaths, their recorded testimony answer this appeal, whether made in the days of the Hebrews or in our own times. Noah, alone preserved alive when a world was drowned; Abraham, who out of the course of nature, received the child of promise; Joseph, exalted from the dungeon to be lord of Egypt,—bear witness that God is true. Moses, who was strengthened to brave the wrath of Pharaoh, to lead Israel forth from Egypt, and to conduct them in safety to the borders of the promised land; Joshua,

to whom it was given to smite the Canaanite, and to plant God's people in their inheritance,—could appeal to the experience of the countless multitude which followed them, that not one “good thing” had failed of all which the Lord had spoken.¹ Those gallant men who by faith in his name, triumphed over the armies of the aliens, bear the same witness for his truth. Elijah, embracing willingly for his sake, destitution and continual affliction; Jeremiah, consenting to shame and imprisonment while living, and at last, to a cruel death; Isaiah, submitting to be sawn asunder,—testify the same thing. He interposed not indeed to save them from these sufferings, but he was with them in the furnace, and more than recompensed their sorrow, pain, and shame. These are God's witnesses; they speak to us from the tomb; and their testimony is that of personal experience. What then is the sum of this testimony? It is that God never said a word which the event did not justify as true, that he never made a promise which he did not also keep, that he never bade them rely on him and gave them cause to regret that reliance. And this is the testimony not of one or two, but of A MULTITUDE, A CLOUD, yea SO GREAT A CLOUD of witnesses.

The references of the preceding chapter, extending as they do, from the time of Cain the fratricide to that of the persecuting Syrian king, from the days of righteous Abel to those of the widow and her seven sons, comprise a period of nearly four thousand years. What a testimony have we in this to the unchanging character of fallen and apostate man! What a consoling proof of the unchangeable faithfulness of God! MAN has been, from age to age, the enemy of truth and righteousness; but his malice has been in vain, for THE LORD has been the dwelling-place of his people from one generation to another.² We have also in these references, combined with the name here given to the saints referred to, a remarkable proof of the truth of what was stated already, viz. that FAITH is not our faithfulness to God, but confidence in his faithfulness to us. It would be mere tautology to say

¹ Joshua xxiii. 14.

² Psalm xc. 1.

that by faithfulness to God Noah prepared his ark, and Abraham left Chaldea; it would be a statement absolutely without meaning, that by the same faithfulness Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau, and Joseph gave commandment concerning his bones. If faith moreover be another name for faithfulness, in what sense are these holy men God's witnesses? For what do they bear testimony? But if on the other hand, it signifies confidence in the Divine faithfulness, the Apostle's language is natural and easy of understanding. We see at once how Noah, confiding in God's protection, hazarded his life to prepare the ark at his bidding; how Abraham, relying on his merciful guidance, went forth from his native land, "not knowing whither he went;" how Isaac, assured of the truth of God's revelations, declared to his sons what should befall their posterity; how Joseph, persuaded that God would keep his promises, commanded that his bones should be carried up and buried in Canaan. And by this faith they have become God's witnesses, witnesses to his truth and faithfulness. A most beautiful illustration of what I now mean to convey, occurs in the gospel-narrative. "A certain nobleman" came from Capernaum to Cana of Galilee, and besought the Saviour to go down with him and heal his son: Jesus simply said, "Go thy way; thy son liveth." But it was enough for him to whom it was addressed, he "believed the word that Jesus had spoken, and he went his way." What a touching example of the beautiful simplicity of faith! And let us mark the reward of this unquestioning believer. Before he reached his home he found that his child was restored, nay that the fever had left him even while Jesus was speaking.¹ Such experience would qualify him to be a witness for Christ's truth. If any one had come after him, seeking the same mercy, and on receiving the same command and assurance from the Saviour, had hesitated to believe and obey it, this nobleman could have said, you need not hesitate, I relied on his word and found it true. Now this was the faith and this also is the testimony of the "cloud of witnesses" with which we are encompassed. They bid us believe God's

¹ John iv. 46—53.

word and trust in his eternal promises : we believed and trusted, they say, and we were not put to shame.

But see the inexhaustible largeness of God's word ; witnesses means also spectators. St. Paul is evidently referring to the spectators at the Olympic games, for the whole imagery of the text is borrowed from these famous diversions. The foot-race was one of them. The runner divested himself of "every weight, laying aside" even his garments, that his person might be light and unencumbered ; he required "patience," because the race was long ; he was rewarded with a crown, if he was the first to reach the goal. There were also many spectators of his running. Thousands of the best and noblest of Greece, raised high on scaffolding, overhung the course, and contemplated with intensest interest the progress of the race. The beauty, the valour, the wisdom of that classic land were there. And often, when the wearied runner was just sinking through exhaustion, he gathered fresh encouragement from the interested eyes which were bent on him, made fresh exertions, and was successful in the end. All this must have been well known to the Hebrews, for of all the diversions of civilized antiquity the Olympic games were the most famous, and Herod the Great had introduced them at Cesarea. Nothing therefore can be more felicitous than the reference of the text. I have spoken to you, he would say, of the saints of former dispensations, from righteous Abel down almost to the coming of the Saviour. They are now in God's bosom, raised high in glory above the world and all sublunary things. Still they have not forgotten this earth and its concerns. It was once the scene of their temptations and trials, the place of their joys and sorrows ; and they therefore regard it now with the intensest interest. They once ran the race which is now appointed to us, and won it ; on us therefore they are now looking down. And they observe the progress of the race, who is foremost and who lags behind, who sinks exhausted and who runs patiently on. Let us look up then, my brethren, St. Paul would say, and be encouraged ; the eyes of heaven's best and noblest are now looking down on us

from above. Those who thus watch us as we run, are aware moreover of our difficulty, sufferings, and toil. Abel has not forgotten his martyrdom; Enoch and Noah still remember the taunts and mockery of a wicked world; their trials in this vale of tears have not faded from the memory of Abraham, of Isaac, or of Jacob. Moses still remembers how he shrunk from proceeding into Egypt at God's command; Joshua still looks back on his consternation and dismay when Israel fled before the men of Ai.¹ Nor have the prophets and faithful men of old, forgotten that they were stoned and sawn asunder, that they were tempted and slain with the sword; they remember still how often they fainted in the day of calamity, and would have been turned out of God's way altogether, but for his help ministered in their hour of need. It is not therefore as careless spectators that they watch us now. When they see us encounter any difficulty, who can tell their interest? When they see us overcome by it, even for a season, who can express their sympathy, their sorrow? When they see us surmount it and run patiently on, with our eyes still fixed on the crown of righteousness, who can conceive their joy? They would fain greet us with their approbation; and the day is at hand when they shall do so. Let us only by faith in God, surmount present difficulties, persevere in the heavenly race and win the prize,—their fraternal embrace shall be our welcome to the mansions of eternal bliss.

It is needless to remark that the twofold character thus attached to God's saints and servants of former days, was fitted to minister most blessed encouragement to the Hebrews, and is fitted to minister it to us. It presented their father Abraham before them, as at once God's witness, and the deeply-interested spectator of his children's earthly course. As a witness for God, he was counselling them to put their trust in him; as their father both after the flesh and spirit, he was looking down with anxious and observant eyes, to see whether they were following his godly counsel. And his bosom, in which Lazarus found a resting-place,²

¹ Joshua vii. 4—9.² Luke xvi. 22.

was the reward prepared for them. All this is true of us. That holy patriarch, "the father of all them that believe,"¹ points to his own experience of God's faithfulness, and counsels us to put our trust in him; he is also still observing with undiminished interest the earthly course of all his faithful children. His testimony for God is echoed by that of the bright company beside him; they as well as he, are intently watching us as we run; they are waiting also with him, to welcome us to the rewards of glory. But their numbers have greatly increased since the words of the text were written; St. Paul himself has now become one of this cloud of witnesses. His fellow-apostles also, and all the faithful of their days, yea all the faithful from their days to the present hour, swell now the amount of the witnessing company, and add to the number of the spectator-band. It was in St. Paul's days, "so great a cloud;" it is now "a multitude which no man can number." Surely there is encouragement now to trust in God; surely there is encouragement now to persevere in his holy ways. Let us drink then into the spirit of the exhortation of the text, "Seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also run the race that is set before us."

II. This brings us to the second thing which we proposed to consider, viz. how this race is to be run. We must "lay aside every weight." The usages of the Olympic games, explain this language. He who hoped to win in the foot-race, divested himself of every incumbrance, even to his garments; he also disciplined his body with fasting, that he might carry little weight when he started for the crown. The spiritual meaning of all this is very easily discerned. Every thing is a weight which hinders us in the service of God, and makes us go heavily in our Christian course. The wealth, the honours, the pleasures of the world are such weights; so are its concerns, its business, and its cares. These weights then must be laid aside; the heart must be disengaged from all these things and given to God alone. "Take heed to yourselves," says our Lord, "lest your hearts

¹ Romans iv. 11.

be overcharged with cares of this life, and so that day come upon you, unawares."¹ There are also other weights. Our kindest friends become so, yea our wives, our children, our parents become so, when they would hinder us in any way from doing God's will. And these too must be laid aside; we must surrender the affection of those dearest to us, rather than displease God. "He that loveth father or mother more than me," is the solemn declaration of our Lord, "is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me."² And there are other weights still; the body, with its appetites, must be brought into subjection if we would run the heavenly race. St. Paul is our example in this holy discipline of the flesh. "I keep under my body," he tells us, "and bring it into subjection." This language contains an express allusion to those very games of which we have been speaking; for in the immediately-preceding context St. Paul refers to the Olympic runner's discipline of his body as an example for Christian men. And having reminded us that the runner's object was "a corruptible crown," whilst his was "an incorruptible," he adds "I therefore so run, not as uncertainly;... I keep under my body...lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away."³ These words teach us that the flesh is indeed a weight; that its unmortified appetites shall prevent us from winning the heavenly race on the one hand; that its mortification and subjection is the only way of ensuring success on the other.

There is however another requisite to success in this heavenly race, we must lay aside also "the sin which doth so easily beset us." It is almost needless to say that this is distrust of God. That is the sin to which from the first, man has been chiefly inclined, and which has been chiefly fatal to him. Paradise was lost by it, at the beginning; it forfeited to Israel the pleasant land of promise; it has shut heaven against thousands in every age of the world, and has peopled hell. God declares that his ways are ways of pleasantness, but his word meets no regard; he assures us

¹ Luke xxi. 34.² Matthew x. 37.³ I Corinthians ix. 25—27.

of his aid in running in them, but we do not believe the assurance; he promises to us the rewards of glory, but we cannot trust his promise. I speak of the heart of man as it is by nature, and the picture is not overcharged: the spring of confidence in God is broken, and the creatures of his hands cannot trust their Maker's word. This sin must, in measure at least, be laid aside, not merely before we can gain the prize, but before we can begin to run the race. And just in proportion as it is not laid aside, it will rob us of the peace of God, and deprive us of the only consolation which, in times of difficulty and discouragement, can sustain the fainting heart. Let us remember therefore the glorious witness for God which his saints and servants of former ages have borne; as we remember it, let us also trust in him; and in the strength of this faith, let us run yea so run that we may obtain.

The text tells us still more plainly how this is to be done; we must run "with patience." The runner in the Olympic games, required to be patient of fatigue, because the race was long. An effort was not enough; that effort required to be sustained if the coveted prize was to be won. It is the same with the heavenly race. The goodness which is "as a morning cloud and as the early dew,"¹ the devotedness to God's service which gives way on the first discouragement, will bring no man to the kingdom of heaven. We must persevere in God's ways, in spite of difficulties, in spite of discouragements and hindrances; we must wait patiently for the rewards of glory. Let us remember Enoch. For three hundred years he walked with God, patiently enduring the contempt of a wicked world, patiently waiting for the recompense of God's reward. At the end of that long period his reward came, he was "translated that he should not see death." And it shall be the same with us if we follow Enoch's steps. Running with patience the race set before us, we shall at length attain the crown. To sum up all then in one word, this race must be run with a heart disengaged from the creature in every form, and stayed on God in the

¹ Hosea vi. 4.

exercise of faith and patience, even that faith which implicitly believes his word, and quietly waits for his own time of fulfilling his promises.

All this was peculiarly applicable to those whom St. Paul was now addressing. Exposed as they then were, to the fury and violence of persecution, if they could not cheerfully consent to surrender property, ease, and reputation for their Redeemer's sake, they were certain to be impeded in their course. Nay, if they valued the affection of those dearest to them on earth, more than the approbation of him who had loved them and given himself for them, they could not possibly advance. There is a striking fulness of meaning therefore in the exhortation of St. Paul; every weight was to be laid aside, nothing which hindered success in the race was to be spared, however precious it might be, however dear, and deservedly dear, to its possessor. Least of all, was the corrupt flesh to be pampered, lest the Spirit should be grieved and withdrawn. When all was in consequence, dark and comfortless within, they would find little strength for contending with the enemy without, and for triumphing over the difficulties which beset every step of their way. St. Paul therefore reminds them, as Christ himself had done, that they must deny themselves, and take up their cross and follow him. Let us not complain, he says, of the long-continuance of our trials; let us not ask why the Lord delays his coming, and to bring that deliverance which he has promised to his waiting people. Let us remember rather the testimony of those who have gone before us; let this testimony teach us to trust in him, and let us patiently abide his time. He who has set the race before us, will yet bestow the crown.

III. This brings us to the third subject of consideration, but we may regard it as explained already. "If a man strive for masteries," says St. Paul elsewhere, referring again to the games of antiquity, "yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully."¹ His course was marked out for the runner in the Olympic foot-race, by those who had the direction of

¹ II Timothy ii. 5.

the games; if he deviated into a course of his own, he forfeited the crown. God, in like manner, says the Apostle, has set our race before us, i.e. has ordered our circumstances, has prescribed to us our duties, has appointed our trials and ordained the time of their continuance. And if we are dissatisfied with his appointments, and choose a course for ourselves, determining what we shall do, and fixing a period to our sufferings, we are not striving lawfully, and shall forfeit the promised crown. Let us have confidence then, the Apostle would say, in him who has ordered the race. He knows our frame, what we are able both to do and to suffer, and he cannot be asking more from us than by his grace we are able to render. The Olympic runner might be spent with toil, but he saw the goal before him and the noble spectators which looked on him, and thought only of the promised reward. And if our course is arduous, let us think only of following the example of his patience. Every step which we take, is bringing us nearer to the promised glory and to the fraternal welcome of the blessed inhabitants of heaven.

He who set a race before the Hebrews, has set a race before us also. Our condition has been appointed, not by chance, but by that heavenly wisdom which cannot err. It has chosen our place for us in the family, whether it be that of husband or wife, parent or child, master or servant. It has chosen our place for us in society, whether that be among the rich or the poor, the noble or the ignoble, the prosperous or the unfortunate. It has appointed also our several callings, and prescribed our several duties. And to run this race, is to recognize the hand of God in our circumstances, and to seek to discharge, as unto him, the duties which these circumstances require. We shall meet with difficulties and hindrances in every condition; but there is no difficulty nor hindrance which may not be surmounted and overcome by the love of Christ shed abroad in the heart, and by the grace of his Almighty Spirit. Let us be patient then, and seek to approve ourselves to God: he who has appointed the race, knows what we are able both to do and to bear. Let

us be patient, I again say, for our difficulties shall soon be ended. Every step is bringing us nearer to the promised reward, and soon, if we faint not, shall we be gathered to the company of the just now made perfect in the bosom of God.

This can only be however through our following the counsel of the text. We must not be contented with mere admiration of the noble men referred to in the preceding apostolic discourse; we must follow their steps. That we may believe in God with Abraham, we must open our hearts to the holy gospel, and seek to be delivered from "the sin which doth so easily beset us." That we may serve him with holy Enoch and devoted Elijah, we must seek to have our affections disentangled from the creature and from the cares and engrossments of time, and filled with the hopes and glorious anticipations of eternity. Then shall these sainted patriarchs and prophets recognize us as their fellow-servants, and watch our course on earth with the anxious interest of brethren. And then too, when this world is no more, and all its concerns are remembered as a dream, we shall be privileged with them to see the King in his beauty, and to find in his bosom our eternal rest. The Lord grant it to each one of us!

See Appendix, Note R.

LECTURE XXIII.

Hebrews xii. 2.

"Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

THE Hebrews have been exhorted to run with patience the race set before them; they have been reminded that the goodly company of prophets, martyrs, and men of God who had run the same race in every age, were at once bearing testimony for the Divine faithfulness and watching their course with the intensest interest from above. But they might have complained of want of strength for a race of such difficulty and trial. St. Paul therefore adds in the words which we have just read, "Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of faith," to Jesus who will strengthen from on high. And lest even this consideration should prove insufficient to encourage, he proceeds next to enforce his argument, adding the example of that very Saviour, to whom he bids them look for aid, to the examples of the saints already brought before them; adding his bitter cross to the list of their endurances, and his glorious crown to the rewards which their faith obtained. So that the subject brought before us by the text, is Jesus THE STRENGTH and EXAMPLE of his people. We shall consider the Saviour in both aspects, and then in the union of the two; applying the subject at once to the Hebrews and ourselves. And may God give us grace to meditate aright on so blessed and glorious a theme!

I. Looking unto Jesus the author and PERFECTER OF FAITH.

Let us observe what the Apostle says here; let us observe also what he does not say. He has been speaking of the saints of all former dispensations; he has told the Hebrews and us that they are the spectators of our earthly course, and witnesses on God's behalf for our daily encouragement and consolation. He therefore bids us run, looking to Jesus: his silence forbids us to look to them. We have his warrant for believing that Moses and Elijah are the spectators of our earthly course; we have not his warrant for expecting their assistance in our difficulties and trials. They had strength in which to run their own race, in which to meet their own difficulties; they have none to minister to us. The Apostle draws therefore a marked and evident line of distinction; they are our witnesses, he says, but Jesus is our Strength. And this is made still more evident by the character which he here ascribes to Christ, and in which he bids us look to him. Ye who exalt the saints, and speak of their intercession, and bid us expect their aid, when ye can tell us of a saint who is "the author and perfecter of faith," we will gladly look to him and invite others to look along with us. But a character so exalted, it is needless to remark, can belong to a Divine person only. That we may clearly understand this, and be encouraged to look to him to whom alone it does belong, let us consider it in both its parts.

The Author of faith is he who first taught man to believe in God, who first inspired him with this noble principle. To his grace alone, the faith, obedience, and attainments referred to in the preceding chapter, are to be traced; to the same grace we owe it that any faith and any obedience to God is now found amongst the children of men. This honour belongs to Christ; he is the Author, not of our faith only, but of faith itself; of all the faith that ever has been, of all that is now in the world. There is therefore a very close connection between the name here given to him, and the discourse which has immediately preceded. The

Hebrews might have said to St. Paul, You bid us follow the example of those who have gone before us, but who shall enable us to tread in their sainted footsteps? He who enabled them, is the answer of the words of the text. It was CHRIST who taught righteous Abel to bring his offering in faith, who strengthened Enoch for three hundred years to do God's will, who encouraged Abraham to leave his country and father's house, who inspired Moses with such indomitable courage that he despised the wrath of Pharaoh, who enabled devoted Elijah to tread the world beneath his feet. You wonder at their attainments, but you forget the secret of their strength,—they looked to their Saviour on high. Look you to the same Saviour, the Apostle would say, now revealed by his name of Jesus; and you shall receive of their strength, and participate in their triumphs. And Jesus is not the Author only, he is also the Perfecter of faith. He sustains it now, amid all its trials; he nourishes it daily into strength by larger and yet larger discoveries of his grace and mercy and goodness; he shall present it perfect in the day of his appearing, “unto praise and honour and glory.”¹ We must not therefore regard the attainments of Abraham or of Moses as objects of admiration merely; if Jesus is the perfecter of faith, there is no attainment which has been made, which may not be made again. “He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk,” not as Abraham and Moses, but “even as he walked.”² This word has likewise another meaning; it signifies rewarder. We have had examples of this already. We have been told that it pleased the Father to make the Captain of his people's salvation “perfect through sufferings,” i.e. to advance him, through sufferings, to his perfect reward.³ We have been told also that those servants of God who lived under all preceding dispensations, could not be “made perfect,” i.e. could not be advanced to their state of final blessedness, till we were ready to partake with them.⁴ And in the text, in like manner, Jesus is presented, as at once the inspirer of his people's faith, and its rewarder at the great day. The

¹ I Peter i. 7. ² I John ii. 6. ³ Hebrews ii. 10. ⁴ Hebrews xi. 40.

distributor of the Olympic prize was generally one who had been himself victorious in the games. And who then is worthy to distribute the rewards of glory? He, and he alone "who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame,"—who not only contended in the race, but won it, "and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God." Surely in looking to him, we must find all the grace and all the consolation which we need. Do we complain that the race is long, and that our strength begins to fail? Jesus, the inspirer, the nourisher and perfecter of faith, is with us to renew it. Do we complain that our trials are many? They shall soon be ended; already the goal appears in sight, and JESUS STANDING BESIDE IT, WITH THE CROWN OF GLORY IN HIS HAND. In the Olympic contest, as St. Paul reminds us elsewhere,¹ many ran, but one only received the prize. It is not so with the prize of faith and obedience; it is reserved for all. To this we have the testimony of one who distanced many of his fellows in the race. "Henceforth there is laid up for me," he tells us, "a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me in that day:" and "not to me only," he is careful to add, "but unto all them also that love his appearing."²

II. To run this race, is to follow Christ's example. Let us then proceed with the text, which presents that example before us:—

Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and HAS SAT DOWN at the right hand of the throne of God.

These words present faith to us as it has been so often presented already. We see it in its nature, confidence in God; in its results, obedience to his will; and in its reward, the accomplishment of his promises and the attainment of his final glory. But it must never be forgotten that there is an immeasurable difference between this illustrious example of faith and those to which the preceding discourse refers.

¹ I Corinthians ix. 24.

² II Timothy iv. 8.

In Abraham and Moses we see faith with its results and reward; but they are all in imperfection. In Jesus on the other hand, we see perfect faith, working by perfect obedience and perfect love, and attaining to the perfect reward, THE HONOURS OF ETERNAL GODHEAD. Let us consider this particularly. We shall direct our attention, first, to the obedience of Christ; second, to the faith which prompted this obedience; and third, to the reward which this faith and obedience have obtained.

1st. He "endured the cross." These words describe his whole life on earth, at least from the commencement of his ministry. "If any man will come after me," was his word, "let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me."¹ For he was no sooner set apart to his Father's work by the baptism in Jordan and the voice from heaven, than he began to suffer at the hand of Satan through temptation, and at the hand of man through reproach, reviling, and persecution. And sorrows from the hand of God, of a deeper kind than either man or Satan could inflict, began then also to gather round him. So that he was emphatically, as he had been described in prophetic vision, "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief;" his visage also was marred more than that of "any man, and his form more than the sons of men."² In this then we see his obedience; he took up this cross daily, denying himself and following only the will of God. The words of the text however have especial reference to that death on the accursed tree which closed this life of sorrow. We learn from his own mouth what it cost him to embrace this doom. "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me," was the prayer of suffering nature: "nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt," was the submissive acquiescence of love.³ The death of Jesus is therefore set forth in all the Scriptures, as the grand demonstration of the implicit character of his obedience. He was "obedient," says St. Paul; and if we ask To what extent? "Unto death" is the Apostle's answer, "even the death of the cross."⁴ It was indeed, to use the

¹ Luke ix. 23.

² Isaiah lii. 14. liii. 3.

³ Matthew xxvi. 39.

⁴ Philippians ii. 8.

language of the text, an enduring; it was indeed a cross which he endured. In his death itself and in its circumstances, all those elements of suffering were found, of which we have already spoken, yea they were mingled in one agony. SATAN had then peculiar advantage against him; "this is your hour," said Jesus to the traitor and his band, "and the power of darkness."¹ And of the brief space thus allowed to him he made fearful and malignant use, vexing on the one hand, Christ's holy soul by temptation, and stirring up, on the other, his enemies to take his life. And whilst Satan instigated his murder, MAN was the perpetrator of the deed. It was he who betrayed, condemned, and scourged him; it was he who crucified and slew him. He also added insult to his cruelty, crowning him with thorns and setting him at nought, buffeting and spitting on him, giving him gall for his meat, and offering him, in his death-thirst, vinegar to drink. And neither man nor Satan could have thus prevailed against him, if GOD had not delivered him into their hands. But he did deliver him, and then, as if HE also had been his enemy, hid his face from him in that awful hour. Who may tell the endurance to which this combination of suffering subjected our blessed Redeemer! On a subject so sacred let us hear himself. One Psalm especially contains the experience of the cross; and as the Redeemer pours forth in it the fulness of his afflicted spirit, we find distinct reference to all these causes of woe. The supplicating cry, "Save me from the lion's mouth," indicates but too plainly the presence of Satan on that awful occasion; whilst the complaint "Dogs have compassed me; the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me; they pierced my hands and my feet;" points with equal plainness, to those who nailed him to the tree. Nor does he forget the principal cause of his sorrow. "My God," he exclaims, "why hast THOU forsaken me? Why art THOU so far from helping me?... O my God, I cry...but THOU hearest not." It has been already pointed out that the Apostle has introduced the example of Christ after that of those sainted men to whom

¹ Luke xxii. 53.

the preceding discourse has reference. And I know nothing in all Scripture more affecting than to find the Redeemer in this very Psalm, making mention of those saints of old time, and as one apparently left and utterly forsaken of God, placing him beneath them. "Our fathers trusted in thee," he says: "they trusted, and thou didst deliver them...But I am a worm and no man."¹ It did indeed seem as if he were utterly forsaken when he was left unaided in these murderous hands, till they spoiled him of his precious life and laid him a dead man in the grave. For to such a depth did the Prince of life descend.

2nd. This obedience was the result of faith, "for the joy that was set before him." These words again suggest the image of the preceding verse. In the games which are there referred to, a crown at the end of the race, was "the joy set before" the runner. And often, when wearied nature was just sinking through exhaustion, the hope of obtaining it, inspired him with fresh resolution and made him run patiently on. Jesus in like manner, had a race appointed to him, even the way of his Father's commandments.² "I came down from heaven," he tells us, "not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."³ This way was rugged and painful; it became more so, every step; and the last steps were the most painful of all. But a "joy was set before" the runner. He had the Father's SOLEMN ASSURANCE that he should be raised out of the dust of death, and exalted to the right hand of power as His people's Lord and Saviour. And relying on this assurance with PERFECT FAITH, Jesus ran on though faint and weary, and finally won the race. He was indeed weary, for we find him, in the garden, "sorrowful and very heavy;"⁴ he was indeed faint, for there appeared to him, in that awful moment, "an angel from heaven, strengthening him."⁵ It was not the body, but the spirit which needed strength. The ministering angel would doubtless remind him of the light which should succeed the overwhelming darkness, of the joy which should swallow up the

¹ Psalm xxii. 1—21.² Psalm cxix. 32.³ John vi. 38.⁴ Matthew xxvi. 37.⁵ Luke xxii. 43.

sorrow. And these blessed anticipations sustained the afflicted One, and bore him through his agony. In the exquisite language of the poet,—

“ Hope's precious pearl, in sorrow's cup,
Unmelted at the bottom lay;
To shine again, when all drunk up
The bitterness should pass away.”

But our blessed Redeemer, in the closing scene of his eventful life, had more than mere sorrow to bear. His sorrow was of that peculiar kind which tries the strength of faith; and faith alone therefore enabled him to endure it. He was delivered into the murderous hands of Satan and wicked men, and experienced at the moment when he chiefly needed help, the hiding of the countenance of God. Perfect faith alone could have endured such a dealing. His truest-hearted servant would have utterly given way in circumstances which constrained even him to ask “Why hast thou forsaken me?” But his absolute confidence in the Father's never-changing faithfulness, carried him victorious and triumphant through that dark and dreadful hour. That victory and triumph appeared at the moment of his lowest depression, when he was hanging between two malefactors, listening to the execrations of his enemies, and beholding before him the opening grave. He proved by his language to one of those who died beside him, that he was just as assured at that moment of receiving the crown of glory, as he is assured of it now, when sitting at the right hand of God.

Perfect faith can dwell only in a heart of perfect love. The perfect faith of Jesus dwelt in such a heart; that perfect love was found in him which cast out all suspicion, and the very semblance of doubt and fear.¹ The text bears witness to this love; “the joy that was set before him” was not a selfish joy. He knew that by his endurance of the cross and consequent exaltation to glory, the name of the Father should be glorified, and an innumerable multitude of man's ruined family, should be saved and blessed eternally. His own words declare this. “Except a corn of wheat” he said

¹ I John iv. 18. I Corinthians xiii. 7.

to his disciples, "fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." We know also from himself, what he considered fruit; "I" he continued, "if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me."¹ By laying down his precious life and taking it again, he was to "gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad,"² and to fulfil the Father's eternal purpose of bringing "many sons unto glory."³ And the sure hope of this blessed consummation was the constraining motive of all his labours, sufferings and toils. Inspired by this faith and love, he not only endured the cross, but endured it "despising the shame," i.e. esteeming as unworthy of a thought, its most painful and bitter accompaniment. But can this be? Is it possible that he who complains, "All they that see me laugh me to scorn: they shoot out the lip, they shake the head;" who complains again, "Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness:"⁴ is it possible, I repeat, that he esteemed shame as nothing? Not as nothing in itself, but as nothing in comparison of the joy. How exceedingly precious to his spirit then must that joy have been! How entire, how deep, how devoted must have been the love to the Father and to us which could make that meek and gentle One, whose tender heart reproach was daily breaking, esteem reproach unworthy of a thought! We see in this the power and wondrous excellency of love. Truly it "endureth all things;"⁵ "many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it: if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be condemned."⁶ How excellent must it have appeared in the Father's sight, when seen in perfection in Jesus! His perfect faith, dwelling in such a heart, may be fitly compared, in the imagery of the book of Proverbs, to the apple of gold set in the picture of silver.*

¹ John xii. 24. 32.² John xi. 52.³ Hebrews ii. 10.⁴ Psalm xxii. 7. lxi. 20.⁵ I Corinthians xiii. 7.⁶ Canticles viii. 7.

* Gold is in Old Testament-Scripture, as I believe, the symbol of truth; and Silver, of love. Gold set in silver, is therefore the fit image of the knowledge and faith of the truth dwelling in the loving heart. See Proverbs xxi. 11.

3rd. We must now speak of the reward which this faith and obedience have received,—“and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” It has been pointed out already that this seat infers equality with Jehovah, and that Jesus has assumed it by command, and as the reward of faith. If these statements seem at variance with each other, the difficulty has been explained.¹ The Son of God, the fellow of Jehovah, consented for our sakes, to descend into our mortal nature, to prove our condition of weakness and continual dependence, and to purge our sins by the shedding of his own blood. The Father promised to reward him for this act of wondrous mercy, by raising him from the dust of death, and exalting in his person, to the eternal throne, the nature which he had been pleased to assume. We find Jesus accordingly, in the days of his flesh, putting the Father in remembrance of this promise. “Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell,” he says; “neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. Thou wilt shew me the path of life:—at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore:”² So that when the Father made this mercy to pass before him, and seated him at that right hand of everlasting joy, it was in answer to the holy confidence which these words express. All Scripture bears harmonious witness to this blessed mystery of our faith. St. Paul tells us of the working of God’s mighty power “which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and seated him at his own right hand in the heavenly places.”³ And we read in a Psalm which can apply to Christ alone, “The king shall joy in thy strength, O Lord...Thou preventest him with the blessings of goodness: thou settest a crown of pure gold on his head...Honour and majesty hast thou laid upon him...Thou hast made him most blessed for ever...FOR THE KING TRUSTETH IN THE LORD.”⁴ These things make it possible to speak of the reward of Jesus, though he be the Son of God, and to speak of it as the reward of faith. Deeper is not than he descended, and it was faith which lifted him

¹ Vol. I. p. 20—23. ² Psalm xvi. 10, 11. ³ Ephesians i. 19, 20. original text.

⁴ Psalm xxi. 1—7.

from the depths: higher is not than he has now ascended, and it was faith which opened the way.

The human mind is lost in the contemplation of this mighty subject. We know not at which to wonder most, the depth of the Divine condescension, or the height to which human nature has been raised; *THE SON OF THE EVERLASTING wrapped in swaddling clothes*, or the *Son of Man* SEATED BETWEEN THE CHERUBIM. It shews in a very striking manner, the truth of a statement already made, that while the honours of Jesus are the purchase of his work, they prove his person to be Divine. For the honours of the text are "Divine honours, and could not have been granted to any to whom they appertained not by birth-right."¹ It proves in a manner equally striking, the truth of the inspired statement that "God is love."² An illustrious stranger once visited our earth, and his work was to do good. He went about giving eyes to the blind, feet to the lame, hearing to the deaf, and power of speech to the dumb.³ And this life of love found its termination in a death of unspeakable mercy: He gave himself for man's salvation, bearing his sins in his own body, on the tree. Who is he, we ask, who has loved so well? Let us repair with the women to the sepulchre, we shall find that the grave could not hold him; let us take our stand with the disciples on Mount Olivet, we shall see him ascend on high. Let the eye of faith still follow him and mark how he is received above. Cherubim and seraphim make way, and HE TAKES THE SEAT OF GOD. We discover now who our illustrious visitant has been, we find to our amazement that "the world was made by him, and the world knew him not."⁴ Oh that the poet's wish were realized, that we could

"See a bard all fire,
Touched with a coal from heaven, assume the lyre,
And tell the world, still kindling as he sung,
With more than mortal music on his tongue
That he who died below and reigns above
Inspires his song, and that HIS NAME IS LOVE."

¹ Vol. I. p. 23. ² 1 John iv. 8. ³ Acts x. 38. ⁴ John 1. 10.

Thus it is then that the Son of God and man has attained the glory with which he is now invested. But here I must pause: of the glory itself I am not able to speak. Heavenly prophets have sung, and inspired apostles have discoursed of it, and the devotion of the grateful Church has poured forth its very soul in eloquence. But still, after all that has been written and said and sung, it cannot enter into the heart of man to conceive it. We may follow however as far as Scripture leads. St. Paul tells us of high exaltation, of a name above every name, of every knee bowing, and every tongue confessing.¹ As we listen to the notes of the golden harps above, we hear power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing, ascribed to "the Lamb that was slain."² And there is another harp before which these harps are silent.

"Enthroned upon a hill of light
A heavenly minstrel sings,
And sounds unutterably bright
Burst from the golden strings:
Who could have thought so FAIR A FORM
Once bent beneath an earthly storm!"

Let us catch the notes of that harp, let us listen to the song of Jesus. "Thou hast turned for me," he says, "my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness; O Jehovah my God, I will give thanks unto thee for ever!"³ Such is the reward which perfect faith and love have received from the generous hand of God, the reward of him "who, for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame."

III. But this example of Christ discourages, it may be said; it is too perfect that we should ever attempt to follow it. It would discourage indeed if it stood alone. In the text however it does not stand alone: Jesus is presented as at once THE EXAMPLE and STRENGTH of his people. It is when we contemplate the Saviour in this twofold aspect, that the remembrance of him is so full of consolation. We are

¹ Philipians ii. 9—11. ² Revelation v. 12. ³ Psalms xxx. 11, 12.

told that he is our strength; that he can sustain us in every trial; that he can help us in every difficulty; that he can make us more than conquerors in the end. But what pledge have we of these things? Our pledge is his example; the conquests which he has achieved in his own person, over difficulty, danger, and death. This banishes despondency and fills the soul with hope. For if he who "endured the cross, despising the shame," be indeed in us "the author and perfecter of faith," we need no other consolation. This is evidently St. Paul's object in introducing Christ's example here. It is not merely that it is perfect, whilst those adduced before, were imperfect; it is the perfect example of one who can enable us to follow him. Even had Abraham and Elijah been perfect, they could not have assisted us. But Jesus was not only perfect himself, was not only never overcome, but has promised to exert on our behalf, that almighty strength in which he triumphed. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," was his assurance to the disciples; "but be of good cheer," he added, "I have overcome the world."¹ You have seen me, he would say, when the world has smiled; you have seen me, when it has frowned; I have been unseduced in the one case, untterrified in the other. Be of good cheer therefore, for I will communicate the same strength to you. My victory is thus the pledge of yours; because I have overcome, you shall overcome also.

This subject is so exceedingly important that I feel constrained to dwell on it. We have been already reminded that we are the soldiers of Jesus Christ. Now that which nerves the soldier's arm and strengthens his heart as he goes forth to battle, is not so much the multitude of the army of which he forms a part, as the character of the Chief whom he is following. If he is one who has never been defeated, his very name, and above all, his presence, acts like a charm on the soldiers whom he leads;

"One blast upon his bugle-horn
Is worth a thousand men."

¹ John xvi. 33.

History, both sacred and profane, abounds with illustrations of this truth. England could once boast of a general, who never, on any occasion, was defeated. It is said that in one of his many battles, a portion of his army was just giving way under a charge of the enemy, when he rode into the midst of them. A soldier called out in extacy, "There's the General, I would rather see his face than a whole brigade!" And these words turning all eyes on their Chief, so reassured his comrades that they repulsed the foe. For he is beside us, they said, who was never defeated yet, and will not be defeated now. God himself appealed to this principle, to encourage Israel to war. In their first battle, which was with Amalek in Rephidim, Moses by his command, stood on the top of the hill in their sight, with the rod of God in his hand. That rod in the hand of their unconquered leader, had always been the signal of victory and triumph; it had turned the Nile into blood, it had smitten Egypt with pestilence, it had drowned Pharaoh and his host in the Red Sea. Israel saw him now lift it in the battle; and surely, they said, he has not lifted it for the first time in vain. Animated therefore by the sight, they fought and conquered; "Joshua discomfited Amalek and his people with the edge of the sword."¹ Now it is in the spiritual, as in the natural; and hence the strength of "looking unto Jesus." The only relation which our leader has ever borne to the enemy, has been that of a triumphant conquerer. Satan assaulted him in the wilderness, but was unable to prevail; he assaulted him in Gethsemane, but was shamefully defeated; and though he seemed to succeed on Calvary, it was in appearance only. He was outgeneralled on that memorable occasion. The death which he had devised for the blessed One proved the destruction of his empire; Jesus spoiled the powers of darkness, triumphing over them in his cross.² And as the calm countenance of a hitherto victorious Chief encourages the soldiers in the heat of conflict, so to realize the presence of Jesus, and by that faith which can gaze upon invisibles, to see him beside us, cannot but reassure, cannot but sustain

¹ Exodus xvii. 8-13.² Colossians ii. 15.

the heart. I am indeed sorely pressed, the tempted Christian reasons, but I am under the conduct of One, who was able to endure the cross; who, despite of the powers of darkness, prevailed to ascend to the right hand of the heavenly throne; of One who never was vanquished yet, and cannot be vanquished now. And thus in moments of deepest despondency, when all hope is lost and Satan seems sure of victory, let faith but realize the triumphs of him who thus trod him under foot, and realize also the presence of that leader with us, and we shall spring from the ground exclaiming, "Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I shall arise."

The lesson which this precious subject was fitted to teach the Hebrews, is equally needful for us. If it shews us how the Holy One of God believed and loved and suffered, and through victorious faith obtained the promised glory, it tells us also that in all this, he is our pattern. Let us then be found looking to him, that we may follow his steps. Let us ask his Spirit; to ask, is to receive: let us ask his heart of faith, love, and obedience; it shall be freely given. Let not the glory in which he sits above, make us afraid to do so; the robe of glory covers a heart of tenderness and love. "Fear not," was his word to the terrified disciple, when because of that glory, he "fell at his feet as dead:"¹ Fear not, is his word to all who draw nigh unto him now. Drawing nigh and receiving of his Spirit, we shall know him as the Author and Perfecter of faith, and another day, as its Rewarder. As surely as the Father has crowned and exalted him, so surely shall he crown his people, so surely shall he set them on high. No creature indeed may ever sit where he is sitting now; but he shall yet assume his own throne, the throne of the Son of David, and his saints shall sit beside him. May it please him, of his gracious goodness, to hasten that glorious day; and may we be counted worthy to share in its unspeakable and endless joy!

¹ Revelation i. 17.

See Appendix, Note S.

LECTURE XXIV.

Hebrews xii. 9—11.

“For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him : for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons. Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”

THE verses which we have now read, form an appropriate sequel to the exhortations which have preceded them. The Hebrews are reminded what Christ's endurances had been, and that theirs, in comparison, had as yet been nothing. And then, lest this consideration should appear insufficient, their afflictions are presented to them in another and totally new light. They are for your good, says St. Paul, and are therefore a mark of your heavenly Father's love. They come indeed from the hands of wicked men, instigated by your ad-

versary the Devil, but heavenly wisdom appoints and overrules them for your present and eternal well-being. We submitted, he adds, in the days of our minority, to the correction of our earthly parents, although it might sometimes be unwise; and now in mature age, we feel the benefit of having done so: surely then we ought to welcome the rod of our heavenly Father. It does not indeed appear for the present joyous, but by yielding "afterward the peaceable fruit of righteousness," it will give us cause for an eternal song of praise.

Such is the substance of these verses. They teach us that the people of God should not be discouraged under trial, first, because Christ their Lord and Saviour was more sorely tried than they; and second, because their God appoints it, and appoints it for their good. We shall take these considerations in order.

I. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

The conjunction "for" with which this verse commences, indicates that the writer is still dwelling on the sentiment of the verses preceding. I have bid you run with patience, he says, remembering the example of Jesus, for consider, I pray you, what his endurances were. These endurances were set before us in the preceding verse, under the general heads of the cross and the shame; they are set before us now as the contradiction of sinners, but the idea expressed is the same. Men refused to receive the testimony of that blessed One, or to admit the claims of his love. It was not as when man combats the opinions of his fellow, and is not convinced by his arguments; the resistance which Jesus experienced, arose, not from a clouded intellect but from a bad heart, it was the contradiction "of sinners." He had to deal with an unbelief which would not be convinced, which hardened itself against the pleading of affection, which wrested the most innocent words to its own malignant use, and put on the most innocent acts its own malignant construction.

"These things I say, that ye might be saved; and if I say the truth, why do ye not believe me?"¹—was the pleading of Jesus with it, the pleading which it refused to hear. Nor was this all; insult, opprobrium, and blasphemy were the expressions of the hatred which prompted it. St. Paul calls it therefore "*such* contradiction," for the treatment which Christ met with was unexampled in the history of mankind. His whole behaviour was gentleness and love, and yet no one was ever subjected to such insulting language from man's mouth, or to such rude violence from his hand. A scribe once answered him "discreetly," and Jesus, astonished at the unwonted sound, said to him from whom it had proceeded, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."² But this, alas, was a solitary case; the hatred of the sinners by whom our Lord was surrounded, continued to increase in bitterness, till it poured forth at last the fulness of its venom in the pain and shame of the accursed tree. This contradiction moreover was "against himself." You complain, St. Paul would say to the Hebrews, of the opprobrium and violence to which you are subjected; remember that the Son of God, sitting now on the throne above, is he who endured these things. This consideration gives to the statement before us inexpressible emphasis of meaning. It was to the heir of the praises of eternity, of the honours of Godhead, that blaspheming Israel dared to say, "Thou art a Samaritan, and hast a devil." But infinite dignity when thus wantonly outraged, exhibited the patience of infinite love. "I have not a devil," was the answer of him who "reviled not again," "but I honour my Father, and ye do dishonour me."³ The text was thus fulfilled in him, he "endured" this contradiction. But it was an endurance; there was no stoical apathy in the Son of the Blessed. "I have laboured in vain," was the complaint of his disappointed affection, "I have spent my strength for nought, and in vain." Still however, he fainted not. God had said of him by Isaiah, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth...he shall

¹ John v. 34. viii. 46. ² Mark xii. 28—34. ³ John viii. 48, 49.

not be discouraged." And these words were fulfilled; Jesus "committed himself to him that judgeth righteously," and turned not aside till he had finished his appointed task. He complains indeed of having laboured in vain, but he adds immediately, "yet surely my judgment is with the Lord, and my work with my God." And he could say at the last when reviewing his course on earth, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."¹ The Apostle sets before the Hebrews this bright example, to preserve them from the temptation of weariness and hopeless discouragement. They were then bearing witness for Christ, in circumstances similar to his own. They had to contend with the same obstinate unbelief, they were subjected to the same opprobrium, the same insult and violence. Their natural tendency in such circumstances was to say, We will bear witness for the Saviour no longer; it is unavailing, and we are weary of trouble, persecution, and reproach. Christ was not discouraged in this way, the Apostle reminds them, but persevered in his Father's work; and you know that the issue has been glorious. And if you follow his example, leaving, as he did, your judgment with the Lord, the issue of your work shall be glorious also.

Moreover, adds their faithful monitor,

Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

The errand on which Christ was sent into the world, was to strive against sin. His work on earth accordingly, as we learn from his own words, was to testify of the world, "that the deeds thereof were evil."² It was this which so incensed the world against him, and stimulated those by whom he was surrounded, to that insulting language, and to those acts of barbarous violence, of which we have already spoken. But though daily subjected to this treatment, Jesus would not cease; and man, provoked till he could bear no longer, nailed him at last to the accursed tree. It was part of his work however to consent to this ignominious death; he died

¹ Isaiah xlix. 4. xlii. 1. 4. I Peter ii. 23. John xvii. 4. ² John vii. 7.

as the martyr of God and righteousness, sealing with his blood his testimony against sin. And he fulfilled the words before us in a deeper sense than this. That he might be God's witness against iniquity, he was tempted of Satan and through a wicked world; and he strove, when thus tempted, resisting unto blood. This solemn and awful subject has been already brought under our notice. We have followed Jesus to Gethsemane; we have seen him prostrate on the ground in the conflict of that fearful hour; we have witnessed his agony when the ministering angel descended to his aid; he was content to sweat blood, but he was NOT CONTENT TO SIN.¹ Now his people to whom the words before us were addressed, had the same twofold work to do. They had to bear witness for God against a world which was lying in wickedness; they had to strive in their own persons against the iniquity which enticed them on every side. And your endurance, the Apostle reminds them, in doing this your appointed work, have been as nothing to those of your Saviour. Your persecutors have reviled you and spoiled your goods, but they have not yet laid their hands on your persons, they have not yet shed your blood. Have Gethsemane also in remembrance; temptation with you has never reached that dreadful height. And even should these things happen, should your persecutors attempt to slay you, and Satan endeavour, by all manner of threatened cruelties to terrify you from adherence to the Saviour, you have his example before you. "Fear not" therefore "them which kill the body;"² be content, with him, to bear any suffering to which nature can be subjected; but do not consent to unfaithfulness, do not consent to sin against the Lord.

The considerations suggested by the former of these verses, are fitted to comfort all Christ's servants and especially the ministers of his gospel. We become by degrees, experimentally acquainted with the human heart and with the state of the world around us; and meeting daily with the contradiction of sinners, and seeing apparently little fruit of our most zealous efforts, we are tempted to give

¹ Vol. I. pp. 268—270.

² Matthew x. 28.

them over in despair. But it is indeed an antidote to this weariness of spirit, to remember the discouragements of our blessed Master. No one ever laboured so indefatigably as he; and yet no labours were apparently productive of so little fruit. Nevertheless he did not faint, for he believed his Father's word. And that word has been accomplished; they have not been without fruit in the end. The salvation of a redeemed world has been the fruit of them. He who in the days of his personal ministry, was deserted almost by every one,—who was reduced so low that he said to the twelve, “Will ye also go away?”¹—“shall yet see of the travail of his soul” in “a multitude which no man can number, out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation.”² And it shall be with the servants as with their Master. No work or labour undertaken for God, shall be in vain; the fruit of it shall yet appear. The blessed rewards of eternity shall then make the discouragements of time be forgotten; he who now goes forth weeping, “bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him”³

And we shall do well to lay to heart the other lesson of the text. There has often, in the experience of all of us, been a contest in the mind, between the claims of principle and self-interest. Conscience has pointed to the path of duty; but self-interest has whispered that we shall lose our reputation by following it, or it may be, forfeit some prospective advantage, or incur some certain loss. Let us observe the conduct of our Saviour when he was placed in these very circumstances. He was aware from the beginning, that the path which his Father had marked out for him, would conduct him at last to a cross and a bloody grave. And when he approached the end of his course, the dark prospect of this awful termination, threw nature into inexpressible agony. Nevertheless he proceeded. He was content to forfeit the world's favour and every advantage which it could offer; he was content to part with life itself under every possible aggravation of pain and shame; but he

¹ John vi. 66, 67. ² Revelation v. 9. vii. 9. ³ Psalm cxxvi. 6.

was not content to forsake the path of duty. If we then are his people, let us shew it by considering our Saviour, let us seek his Spirit and be animated by his example. In whatever circumstances we find ourselves placed, let us be blind to consequences and deaf to the arguments of expediency,¹ inquiring only what is the path of duty, what is the will of the Lord. We may lose the praise of man in doing so, but we shall certainly obtain a commendation which is far better.

II. The Apostle having thus comforted the Hebrews by reminding them that their sufferings were endured for Christ, presents them now in another aspect, equally fitted to console;—

And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the Father chasteneth not? But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

The exhortation which is here referred to, is contained in the book of Proverbs.² It breathes a father's affection, says St. Paul, but in your trouble and extremity its precious lessons have been forgotten. Remember them now then for your comfort. Do not "despise" trouble on the one hand, as if it came by chance, nor faint under it on the other, as if it were too heavy to be borne. It does not come by chance, but is "the chastening of the Lord;" it is not too heavy to be borne; he who rebukes us, knows our frame and remembers that we are dust. You are subjected now to this fatherly rod, and you complain. But it is a token of the Lord's love, and a sign of your adoption into his family. Scourging is the discipline appointed to every child: was there ever a son whom the Father did not

¹ Isaiah xlii. 19.

² Proverbs iii. 11, 12.

chasten? This question admits only of one reply: God had once a Son without sin; He never had a son without suffering. Christ himself was no exception to this universal canon; "it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief."¹ Your troubles therefore, the Apostle adds, are a test of your legitimacy, a sign of your honourable birth. If you were without them, your relation to God would be questionable; it would appear as if he had repudiated you, that you were children of whom he was ashamed.

As it is obvious that the troubles to which St. Paul was now referring, were not brought upon the Hebrews directly by the hand of God, but by the malice of Satan and through the agency of wicked men, so it is most consoling to observe that he speaks of them as God's chastening. For it proves that though the devil and his servants be the immediate instruments of trouble, our Father above appoints and overrules all. It was thus with Christ himself. He was afflicted by Satan and suffered at the hands of the ungodly, but this affliction and suffering was God's appointed rod. It was also the blessing of his holy child Jesus. He learned experimentally, through these sufferings, the depth of his Father's love; he learned also to sympathize with his afflicted people on the earth. It is thus beyond the power of Satan and ungodly men to hurt the servants of God; all which they can do against them, conduces through a Father's blessing, to their present and eternal well-being. How delightful, how inexpressibly cheering is the contemplation of this truth! Man thinks himself wise when he can prevent his enemy from harming him; but the all-wise God allows his enemies to do their utmost against him, and then turns their schemes to the furtherance of his cause and constrains their wrath to praise him. It does not indeed appear so at present. Satan is now apparently permitted to do much harm to God's cause and people; and those who yield themselves as his agents in this unhallowed work, say and have said in every age, "The Lord seeth not, the Lord hath forsaken the earth."² But the day is coming which shall discover to their eternal

¹ Isaiah liii. 10.

² Ezekiel viii. 12. ix. 9.

confusion, that the Lord has seen it all; that he has been present, though unseen, at all their bloody conclaves; that he has watched with his unslumbering eye, their best-laid schemes of cruelty and violence, and has brought out of all which they have done or conceived in their hearts to do, his own glory and his people's eternal welfare. Bloody Pharaoh, relentless Herod, cruel Nero, and every red-handed persecutor of the saints of God, from Cain the fratricide to the present hour, shall find that it has been so. Yea Satan himself, the father of that murderous brood, shall find that he has been labouring in the same cause; shall find that his masterpiece of hellish wisdom, when he put it into the heart of the traitor to sell his Lord, has issued in the world's salvation and in his own eternal ruin. Surely, were there no other element in the hell of the wicked, this discovery would be enough. It will doubtless be one of the bitterest ingredients in that cup which the enemies of God shall have to drink; malice shall be tortured eternally to find that it has done the work of love.

Having directed the attention of those, to whom he was writing, to the real cause and merciful design of trouble, the Apostle adds with reason,

Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live? For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

If all trouble and affliction, he would say to them, be the rod of our heavenly Father, our behaviour to our earthly parents, ought to teach us to be subject to it. We received from them the life of the body only, and yet, when they corrected us, we reverently submitted; surely then we ought much more to submit to him from whom we have received the inestimably precious gift of that life which cannot die. They chastened us, as they judged best, during the brief years of our childhood; their chastening was perhaps unwise

or administered in passion, and the result was sometimes evil. He never chastens unwisely, or corrects in unreasonable anger; and his rod, if patiently submitted to, cannot fail to profit us. If our reputation is destroyed, if our property is spoiled, if friends forsake us, and every earthly prop is taken away, it is to lead us to him as our only satisfying good. If man proves treacherous and cruel, and we are weary of the world's wickedness, it is to constrain us to take refuge in God, that by knowing more of his unsearchable goodness, we may be changed into his blessed image. And if in this life, sorrow only is meted out to us, it is to teach us to embrace and ever to hold fast the hope of the life to come. In these things is "our profit," and that profit is God's design.

All this may be true, the Hebrews might have answered, but our afflictions are very grievous. St. Paul replies,—

Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.

It is the very nature of chastening, he would say, to be grievous; if it were otherwise, it would cease to be chastening, and could not answer its end. But present grief issues in future joy; we are taught by our Father's rod to walk in his righteous ways, and eternal peace shall be the fruit of this blessed lesson. It is very striking to observe the contrast between the means which God may employ for the chastening of his children now, and the blessed results which shall hereafter follow from their use. The persecution of their enemies was at this time, his rod of chastening to the Hebrews; and they were kept by it continually in danger, trouble, and alarm. But the effect which he designed to produce by this painful discipline, the result which his Fatherly eye contemplated, was their eternal peace. Fear not therefore, St. Paul would say, though you be in the midst of enemies who are waiting to swallow you up. Your present danger, by leading you to make the Lord your rock,

shall issue in eternal security; your present alarm and trouble, by teaching you to make him your comforter, shall prepare you for eternal rest on the bosom of his love.

These lessons are as much for us as for those to whom the text was addressed. We are not suffering indeed from persecution; but is there any who is free from trouble? There is none; "man that is born of a woman is of few days" alas, "and full of trouble." How many, how various are these troubles and miseries! One is tried with loss of substance; another is smitten with sickness; another is deprived of children or of friends. These chastenings are not for the present, joyous, but grievous exceedingly. But the text teaches us to regard them as a Father's rod, the appointment of his love and wisdom for our present and eternal welfare. And our care ought therefore to be to reap the profit which they are designed to convey. As the afflictions which he sends are various, so his intentions are different in sending them. We have been living in forgetfulness of him and thinking only of a present world; and he breaks our idols, that the straying heart may be recalled from the disappointing creature and fixed on himself as its only satisfying good. Or, though we have been taught to love his name and to serve him in sincerity and truth, we have been betrayed, as even devout king David was, into some act of open transgression. And as God on that sad occasion, smote the child which Uriah's wife had borne and would not be entreated for it, he sends some sore trouble upon us, to find out our sin, to second by his act the rebuke of his word, to convince us "Thou art the man."¹ And there may be yet another reason for our feeling the rod of God. There may have been nothing in the state of our hearts or in the character of our lives which has peculiarly grieved his Spirit; we may have been walking before him in sincerity and uprightness; and yet he brings us into trial, that he may impart to us, through trial, increased knowledge of himself. He dealt thus with One who loved him with his whole heart, and never ceased to

¹ II Samuel xii. 1—23.

serve him with the most true and entire devotion. Jesus knew the Father, knew the love, mercy, and faithfulness of him in whose bosom he had lain from everlasting. But it was the will of God that he should know him experimentally. And he was therefore plunged into suffering, brought into circumstances of desperate sorrow when that love and mercy were his only comfort, when that faithfulness was his only prop and stay. Now all experimental knowledge of God must be learned in the same school. The gospel reveals his loving-kindness, his mercy, and his truth; but if we would know indeed that this holy character belongs to him, it is thus only that it can be known. When we are brought into trouble, and are comforted under it by his kindness, we learn that he is kind; when we are abandoned by earthly friends, and find his faithfulness a rock, we learn that he is faithful. And the effect of this lesson is increasing confidence in him, and increasing delight in his ways. "Thou hast delivered," says the holy Psalmist, "mine eyes from tears, and my feet from falling: I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living."¹

Such then is the "profit" of affliction; we are made, through our Father's holy discipline, "partakers of his holiness," being taught to serve him now, and prepared for his presence hereafter. St. Paul may therefore well exhort us to be subject to it "and live," for in this blessed participation, eternal life consists. He who chastens us, is "the Father of spirits;" not of this dying body merely, but of the never-dying soul. And his purpose in sending affliction, is to communicate to the soul and to nourish in it, that sacred principle which is the spring of everlasting felicity. Surely then the profit may cause the pain to be forgotten; if we were subject to our earthly parents, we ought much more to be subject to the Lord.

If these things be true, the statement of the text that "whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth," requires no further proof. Let us go into the chamber of the sick child, and see the parent mixing the nauseous medicine. The child in

¹ Psalm cxvi. 8, 9.

its folly, thinks the parent cruel. But let us see the same child, recovered of its sickness and with the rosy bloom of health on its cheek ; it acknowledges then that what seemed cruelty, was kindness in disguise. Or let us come nearer to the illustration of the text. The wise father, disregarding the entreaties of his child, chastens it severely for its faults ; and the severity and suffering appear to the child excessive. But the same child when grown to be a man, looks back on the evil tempers and wayward dispositions which that severity was the means of checking, and acknowledges to the end of life, his obligations to that parent whose soul spared not for his crying. And it shall be the same with God's children, when they look back from a blessed eternity, on the short-lived corrections of time. They shall cast themselves at their Father's feet, and bless his name for ever. Hadst thou preferred, they shall exclaim with adoring gratitude, our temporary ease to our eternal well-being, we should have forfeited, in our wickedness and folly, the glories of this heavenly kingdom : before we were afflicted, we went astray, but thy correction taught us to keep thy word. Let not the believer be discouraged then under the tribulations of this mortal state. Present trouble, if submitted to in faith and patience, shall issue in eternal peace ; present disquiet shall be recompensed with eternal serenity. God grant that it may be so with us all !

LECTURE XXV.

Hebrews xii. 12—17.

"Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way; but let it rather be healed. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord: looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears."

THE purpose of God in visiting them with trial, has just been set before the Hebrews; they have been reminded that it was sent to promote their present and eternal good. St. Paul now follows up this word of comfort by a suitable admonition, bidding them not sink in despondency, nor have recourse to any crooked measures to obtain deliverance from persecution. He warns them that by doing so, they will increase their difficulties, and add to their despondency; he bids them therefore go forward, encouraging their hearts in the Lord. He further exhorts them to have it as their only care to cultivate peace with men, and to walk in holiness before God, that they might attain at last to the blessedness of those who shall see his face. He beseeches them to look diligently that none of them came short of this grace, and

that no backslider or apostate sprung up among them, to seduce his brethren into sensuality on the one hand or into worldly-mindedness on the other. And to deter them from this latter sin, he bids them remember Esau, and behold in his conduct and in the sequel of his history, an example at once of its criminality and of its fearful results.

This subject calls our attention in the first place, to the duty of the true Christian under trial: he should not be over-anxious about deliverance from it, but should encourage his heart in the Lord. It shews us in the second place, that the objects of his anxious pursuit, should be peace with men and holiness toward God. It impresses upon us, in the third place, the necessity of our making this holiness the object of our care, and the certain and eternal loss which we shall incur by its neglect.

1. *Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; and make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame BE WRENCHED; but let it rather be healed.*

This slight change of the reading agrees, as we may learn from the words themselves, with the evident sense of the text. A most beautiful image is here brought before us. When the heart is light, it communicates its lightness to the body: the hands are applied to labour with diligence and alacrity, and the limbs move nimbly along. But when the heart is heavy, the hands hang down listlessly, and we move with a feeble, timid, and dejected step. The Hebrew Churches were now in this condition. Continuance of affliction had at length broken their spirits: they had once done the will of God with alacrity, but now their hands hung down; they had once run in his ways with joy, but now their steps were slow and feeble. This ought not to be the case, says the Apostle: the trials of which you complain are sent for your eternal good; you ought therefore to lift up these listless hands and to confirm these feeble knees. This exhortation, let me remark further, is taken from the prophet Isaiah. It occurs in connection with the blessings of the

gospel-dispensation and the glories of the eternal kingdom, the promise of the desert blossoming like the rose, and of the redeemed coming to Zion with everlasting joy on their heads. Now these are the very blessings and promises to which St. Paul has just been directing the attention of the afflicted Hebrews. He has reminded them that affliction brings forth the peaceable fruit of righteousness, and makes us partakers of the holiness of God; he has spoken of glory hereafter as its final and eternal reward. And most fitly therefore does he exhort them, at once in the words and in the spirit of *Isaiah*, to run with joy in that way of holiness which their God and Father had set before his redeemed children.¹

It is the tendency of human nature, under severe and protracted trial, to be anxious only for deliverance. And if it is trial for conscience-sake, we are in danger of making undue compliances, and resorting to crooked measures, to obtain the deliverance which we seek. The Hebrews were now in circumstances to feel the force of this temptation. And their spiritual monitor accordingly adapts his exhortation to their condition; "Make straight paths for your feet," he says, "lest that which is "already "lame, be " further "wrenched " and disabled. If a man who is afflicted with lameness turns into a rough and uneven path, the tender and diseased limbs may receive still further damage and be rendered altogether useless. St. Paul has just reminded the Hebrews, that their knees were already feeble, and that they were scarcely able to hold on in the ways of God. And if with these diseased limbs, he says, you turn into crooked paths, making undue compliances with the enemies of your Saviour to avoid the fury of persecution, the pangs of a defiled conscience will be a fearful addition to your present despondency, and you will find it impossible to advance. Attempt no longer then, he adds, to find what appears to your blindness, a soft path for your tender feet; let their lameness "rather be healed," and continue in the way of God. Instead of seeking to bring down your circumstances to your present poverty of spirit,

¹ *Isaiah xxxv.*

labour rather to bring up your spirit to your circumstances, boldly meeting every difficulty and encouraging your hearts in the Lord. This is the only path of present peace, the only way of ultimate and eternal safety,

I need not point out the catholic character of these precious exhortations. We are all exposed, as was pointed out in the last lecture, to the inroads of sorrow; trial may come upon us at any time, and the visitation may be both severe and protracted. We must carefully guard, in such circumstances, against our natural tendency to lose confidence in God and to despond; "the joy of the Lord" is the strength of his people,¹ and despondency is emphatically their weakness. And the considerations of the text are eminently calculated to assist us in doing so. If we are enabled to keep in remembrance that no trial comes by chance, and that its continuance is not the result of chance; that it is sent by God to make us partakers of his holiness, and shall continue only till the gracious end is attained; we shall be enabled also to rejoice under the severest sufferings, and to glorify his name in the fires of tribulation. These sufferings and tribulations may not come immediately from God's hand, but be for conscience-sake. The Apostle's warning, in such a case, deserves our most earnest attention, for the experience of the Church in every age, attests the truth of his words. No servant of Christ ever yet made undue compliances with the enemies of his Divine Master, hoping thereby to purchase ease and quiet, and succeeded in the attempt. The opposite has been the invariable result. The pangs of a defiled conscience have added fearfully to the sorrows of the already-burdened heart; and he who went heavily before, now sinks beneath his load. The early history of our venerable Church contains a striking testimony to this truth. It was the will of God that the tree of England's spiritual liberty should be watered with the blood of many illustrious martyrs; and among these were found Ridley and Latimer and Cranmer. As the hour of nature's agony approached, the frail flesh in each of these holy brethren, shrank from the fiery trial; but their course

¹ Nehemiah viii. 10.

at last was different. Ridley and Latimer made straight paths for their feet; they confessed Christ to the end, and died confessing him. Cranmer however fell, alas, into the very snare against which we are warned in the text. Hoping to preserve his life, perhaps for future usefulness, he disowned the truth for a season, and consented to its enemies. But the result was as the Apostle here foretells. Instead of peace and quiet, the step which this man of God had been seduced to take, brought with it an increase of sorrow; even after he had been recovered by his Saviour's help, and while he was dying as his faithful martyr, a defiled conscience bowed him to the dust. Let not God's people then, when called in question for his sake, attempt for an instant to suit their circumstances to what they imagine is their ability to bear. Let them rather "be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus;"¹ there are no circumstances however evil, in which faith cannot enable us to triumph.

II. Having thus pointed out to the Hebrews and to us that the true Christian under trial, should not be over-anxious for deliverance, the Apostle proceeds to shew what the object of his anxiety should be.

Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.

You are anxious to escape from the violence of your unbelieving countrymen, says St. Paul; be rather anxious to "follow peace" with each other and with them. Let brotherly love and sympathy be your solace in the midst of suffering, and see that you render not to any, even your bitterest enemy, "evil for evil, or railing for railing." If he be hungry, "feed him; if he thirst, give him drink;" "do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which persecute you."² Such behaviour will heap coals of fire on the heads of your adversaries, and constrain them peradventure to be at peace with you; it will also make you manifest as the children of your Father above.³ Be more anxious to re-

¹ II Timothy ii. 1. ² I Peter iii. 9. Romans xii. 20. Matthew v. 44, 45.

semble HIM in character, than to be freed from earthly trials; seek not peace only but "holiness." He has sent your afflictions to make you partakers of his holiness; see then that this object be attained. Let it be your solicitude to have your affections loosened from a present world, to grow in love and confidence and devotedness toward God, to put away from your hearts and lives, every thing which is evil in his sight, to cultivate that purity and righteousness which win his holy approbation. By doing so, you shall attain at last the blessing of the pure in heart, you shall "see God;"¹ by neglecting to do so, you shall come short of this endless felicity. The amount of "our light affliction, which is but for a moment,"² matters little in the end; but "what is a man profited," the Apostle would ask them, "if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?"³

We have again, in these words, a catholic exhortation before us. Peace with man and holiness towards God are still and must ever be the objects of the true Christian's solicitude. Peace with our neighbour is the fruit of love to him, which is the second table of the law; and the love of God, which is the sum of the first table, is the very essence of holiness. Now this law is written on every true Christian's heart, and he must therefore be found habitually complying with the exhortation before us. Let us ask ourselves therefore, whether we are disposed to comply with it. When we are insulted or injured, what is our anxiety? Is it to be avenged for the wrong done to us? God forbid that we should be of such a mind. Is it merely to get rid of the injury? Neither is that the law of Christ. Is it then to behave toward him who has injured us, as Jesus would have done in our circumstances, returning blessing for cursing, and repaying hatred with loving kindness? This is true Christianity, this is following peace. And this peace must be followed "with all men;" our bitterest enemy must be no exception to this universal canon. Love is not overcome of evil, but overcomes evil with good: Jesus was surrounded with enemies, and yet he "gave himself a ransom

¹ Matthew v. 8. ² II Corinthians iv. 17. ³ Matthew xvi. 26.

for all."¹ Again, when we are afflicted by the immediate hand of God, what is our solicitude? Is it merely to be delivered from the trouble which is pressing on us? There is nothing of the mind of Christ in such a wish. Or have we seen something of the glory of him in whom dwells the fulness of uncreated excellence? do we keep in remembrance that his gracious purpose in sending trial is to make us like himself? and are we anxiously solicitous that this blessed result may be attained? This is again the spirit of genuine Christianity, this is following holiness. The present joy of every true Christian is communion with his Divine Lord, and his dearest hope is to see his face hereafter. But there can be no communion with Jesus now, except we resemble him in character; and those only who are like him shall hereafter behold him in his glory. He who knows these things as experimental and solemn realities, has his attention called away from present vexations and troubles; his solicitude and anxieties are of an infinitely more exalted kind.

III. St. Paul next proceeds to point out in the strongest language, the urgent necessity that is laid on us to make this holiness the object of our care.

Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled; lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

These words are a continuation of the admonition which has preceded them. Be not over-solicitous, the Apostle would say, for deliverance from trouble; keep your anxieties for what is more deserving of them. God has given to you the blessed promise of yet seeing his face in glory, and is now causing you to pass through the purifying fires of tribulation,

¹ I Timothy ii. 6.

that you may at last obtain it; see then that none of you fail of this his unspeakable grace. Be on your guard also against every thing which may lead to so fearful a catastrophe. Take heed that there be no one among you who, instead of bringing forth "the peaceable fruit of righteousness," is as "a root that beareth gall and wormwood,"¹ spreading moral poison and defiling many of his brethren. Let there be no sensualist to seduce you into fleshly wickedness; let there be no worldly-minded professor, counselling you to sell your eternal inheritance to secure man's transitory favour. That profane person Esau acted thus, and you know the recompense of his sin. He was rejected afterwards when he thought to inherit the blessing; and neither the Lord nor his father Isaac were moved by his tears and entreaties.

THE circumstances of the Hebrews and indeed of all the early Churches, rendered such an exhortation as this peculiarly suitable. At a time when affliction and reproach were the recompense of faithfulness to the Lord, the false-hearted among them would forsake him, like Demas, because they "loved this present world;"² and their example would naturally exercise an evil influence on their brethren. And we need not wonder that sensuality is here conjoined with worldly-mindedness. The licentiousness of manners which heathenism had encouraged for ages, could not be subdued in a moment; and sensual wickedness of the grossest character was therefore breaking out, from time to time, in all the early Churches. It is sufficient to refer in confirmation, to the Church of Corinth, where they committed excesses even at the table of the Lord, and one went so far as to take his father's wife!³ The Hebrews, living as they did in the midst of the heathen, could not be exempt from this danger. And St. Paul seeing them now exposed to the tempest of persecution, was naturally more than ever fearful lest they should fall into this snare. For he knew that it would grieve the Spirit of the Lord and cause him to withdraw himself; and he trembled lest being thus left defenceless, they should be altogether scattered by the enemy.

¹ Deuteronomy xxix. 18. ² II Timothy iv. 10. ³ I Cor. xi. 20—22; v. 1, 2.
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The exhortation applies also to ourselves. "They shall see God" is Christ's promise to "the pure in heart." But it is to the pure in heart alone: unless we resemble God in character, we can have no joy in being with him for ever. When we are holy, we do resemble him: "Follow holiness" says the text; "his holiness" adds the context. We must open our hearts then to the Spirit of Jesus, that he may dwell in them, and conform us daily to the image of our Saviour above. The expression "looking diligently" implies that by nature we are disinclined to do this. And it is so. The present is a time of much zeal for outward observances, many public services for example, and the keeping of fasts and festivals. There is no need for zeal in such matters: that is not the point in which human nature fails, neither is it from that quarter that spiritual danger is to be feared. The tendency of man is to abound in outward observances, but he is fearfully prone to rest in them, shrinking all the while from personal communion with God. THAT is the point of danger; it is on THAT SIDE that Zion's watchmen should be giving the alarm continually, lest the enemy should gain the advantage. We may be regular and constant in our attendance on the ordinances and observance of the sacraments of God, and yet have no resemblance to Jesus, or be conscious to one thrill of devoted affection to the Most High. The heart of holy love is the blessing after which we must look diligently: every thing else is but a means, it alone is the end. The question at last shall be, not what we have done or observed, but whether we are conformed to the image of that blessed One who shed his blood for our salvation. If we are found unlike him, we cannot abide where he is, we are morally and spiritually unfitted for the holy society which surrounds him, we have failed "of the grace of God."

The Apostle next goes on to warn us that we may come short of this grace through the influence of evil example. For the root of bitterness of which he speaks, which springs up and defiles many, is explained by himself to mean the sensualist and the worldly-minded. Are there no such

persons now in the Church, and is not their example as destructive as it was in the days of the Hebrews? These questions are but too easily answered, and the necessity of the Apostle's warning therefore too plainly appears. There are still, alas, too many who though baptized in Christ's name, have no nobler motive in life, no higher enjoyment than is expressed in the maxim of the heathen, "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." If these pages should fall into the hands of any to whom this fearful character belongs, any who are given to drunkenness, fornication, or some other deadly sin of the flesh, I would speak to them solemnly and plainly. It needs no words of mine to convince you that as long as you persevere in your present course, you are failing of the grace of God. Conscience warns you, unless you have stifled its voice, that those who wallow, as you are doing, in the mire of fleshly sin, are utterly unmeet to behold the glory of Infinite Purity; yea it warns you that such are treasuring up for themselves "wrath against the day of wrath." And do not say in reply, that you are injuring yourselves only. For you are roots of bitterness, bearing gall and wormwood, troubling and defiling the baptized Church of God. Your example is destructive: you are scattering, like the Upas tree, poison and death around you, and you are responsible eternally for the mischief which you thus occasion. I warn the young and inexperienced, as they love their eternal peace, to take heed of your example. And I would remind both you and them, that the day is at hand when the tempter and his victims shall perish together; when those who have been associated in sin, shall in the just judgment of God, be associated eternally in misery. "Gather ye together first the tares," is the fearful command of the Judge, "and bind them in bundles to burn them."¹

Some of us perhaps may now be ready to congratulate ourselves. Our example, we may say, has always been in favour of virtue and religion; we have never been gross sinners. But the text points out another phase of the carnal heart, viz., profanity. And this profanity, be it observed,

¹ Matthew xiii. 30.

is simply worldly-mindedness, the character of the man who lives for the creature and neglects Christ, who lives for time and neglects eternity. We may be doing so, as is, alas, the case with too many, though our outward conduct is irreproachable; and for this state of heart we may at this moment, be accounted profane in the sight of heaven. The text demonstrates the correctness of this interpretation; for it brings Esau before us as an example of this profaneness. And it does not say of him, in proof of the charge, that he was addicted either to drunkenness or adultery; it tells us simply that he "sold his birthright," and that he did so, for a "morsel of meat." Our attention has been already directed to the history of Esau;¹ and a brief reference to it will now suffice. He was the elder son of him in whom the seed was called, and was heir therefore to Abraham's covenant, with its precious and invaluable blessings. Of him the Messiah should have come; and the name at the bush should have been "the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Esau." But that unhappy worldling could see nothing desirable in these blessings; "I am at the point to die," he said, "and what good shall this birthright do to me?" Let me have what I can enjoy now, was the maxim expressed in these words; I do not care to hear of blessings reserved for distant ages, or for a visionary world to come; I will gladly exchange my interest in them for the smallest present advantage. This is the genuine spirit and natural language of unbelief; and Esau, deliberately acting on its fearful suggestions, exchanged for "pottage of lentiles" his interest in God's covenant of peace. Can we wonder then at the language of the text? Can we esteem St. Paul severe in pronouncing him profane?² And there are many, alas, in the baptized Church, who follow the example of this profaneness; who, though outwardly decent and irreproachable, are living for no higher object than the enjoyments, comforts, and gains of this present world. If you tell them of the glorious privileges which God has conferred on them as members of the body of his Son, and of the hopes which he has set before

¹ pp. 233—245.² Genesis xxv. 29—34.

them, it is but too evident that the stupidity of an unbelieving heart makes them incapable of understanding what you say. Tell us, they will answer, of some substantial worldly good, we shall understand you and appreciate it; but do not tell us of these visionary things. Perhaps the tongue gives utterance to this unhallowed sentiment; perhaps, though the tongue is ashamed, the tenor of the life declares it. It matters not in the sight of God; he who gives expression to it either in word or act, has a fearful responsibility before him. He is a root of bitterness, troubling and defiling the Church, and scattering moral poison among his baptized brethren. Nor does the mischief affect the souls of others only: this deadly unbelief will prove the destruction of his own. For if we live for no higher object than this world, and cherish those expectations only which it is able to satisfy, we shall lose eternal life as Esau lost his birthright. We esteem him a fool to have exchanged that precious treasure for a morsel of meat: but we are as foolish as he was, if we act in this way; for the world at its best estate is only a morsel of meat. When we arrive at the shores of eternity, where then shall be the comforts with which we have solaced ourselves here? They shall be gone for ever. And the eternal inheritance which we sold that we might enjoy them, shall it remain to supply their place? No, it also has been lost by the exchange. Oh, is there any folly to be compared to this folly?

If anything is fitted to deter from such folly, it is the signal punishment of him who is the example of it, that "profane person, Esau." This language alone declares its fearful character. It presents a mournful contrast to what is said of his brother Jacob, and of his fathers Abraham and Isaac. "God was not ashamed to be called their God;" while he rejected Esau with abhorrence. The particulars of that rejection are referred to in the text. "Afterwards," says the apostle, he desired to inherit the blessing. Many years had passed since he had sold his birthright, and Esau hoped perhaps that the wickedness of that act was forgotten. He drew nigh therefore in full confidence to his aged father,

but to his surprise and consternation, he found himself rejected. Even then he hoped to alter the Divine sentence and change his father's mind, and sought to do so "carefully, with tears." For he "lifted up his voice, and wept," yea he "cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, Bless me, even me also, O my father." But his entreaties were in vain; the blessing had been bestowed on another. God would not, and Isaac could not, repent of the act; "I have blessed him," said the patriarch, "yea, and he shall be blessed."¹ All this is a fearful foreshewing of what shall happen another day. Men give their hearts and affections entirely to a present world, neglecting the salvation of God; and they amuse themselves, while they do so, with the hope that their sin shall be forgiven at last. It shall not be forgiven; "God is not mocked: ...he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption."² When Jesus appears therefore in his glory, these foolish ones shall be rejected for ever. Oh the sorrows of that hour! What heart of man shall conceive them! It is an awful thing to look on human anguish, and to listen to the lamentations of despair. But there shall be weeping and wailing such as the world never saw, when men shall see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and find themselves thrust out.³ Tears and entreaties however shall then avail nothing; the sentence, "Depart from Me," shall be irreversible and everlasting. God only knows how frail humanity shall endure the weight of this tremendous woe. But we know, for he has told us, that it is our wisdom to lay hold on his salvation, that we may escape it for ever.

And the language of the text implies that every one of us may escape it. Why should it be otherwise? Why should "any man" among us "fail of the grace of God"? We assuredly shall not fail of it, if we take heed to the counsels of the text. Whilst we have experience now of the trials and vexations of this mortal state, let us have it as the one object of our anxious solicitude to be, by the grace of God, his true-hearted and devoted people. We shall be armed

¹ Genesis xxvii. 27—38.

² Galatians vi. 7.

³ Luke xiii. 28.

then against the evil example of others, whether they would seduce us into sensuality, or tempt us into worldliness. Instead of being roots of bitterness, turning our brethren from God by our worldly and sinful lives, we shall be examples of heavenly-mindedness, purity, and righteousness, teaching and encouraging them to serve him. And when the Son of Man, the elder Brother of our Father's many children, shall appear in the clouds of heaven, we shall be privileged to rise among the sons whom he is leading to glory, and to meet him in the air. "They that be wise shall" then "shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that" have turned "many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever."¹ How shall frail humanity, we ask, be able to bear this weight of glory? He who shall lay it upon us, shall give us strength to bear it. Be it our care then to embrace his promises, while it is called to-day!

¹ Daniel xii. 3.

See Appendix, Note T.

LECTURE XXVI.

Hebrews xii. 18—24.

"For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more: (for they could not endure that which was commanded, and if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart: and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake:) but ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel."

WE considered in the last lecture, the solemn warning which St. Paul has just addressed to the Hebrews, not to sell their birthright for a morsel of meat. To render this warning more impressive, he now proceeds to remind them what this birthright was. I am not speaking, he says, of your privileges as circumcised men, of "the giving of the law" with its accompaniments of awful solemnity, which pertained to our nation as the peculiar people of God.¹ These privileges are thrown quite into the shade by the

¹ Romans ix. 4.

blessings which have been conferred on us as the baptized members of Christ. We are come as such, to his precious blood and equally precious mediation ; we are come also to Mount Zion, the seat of his glorious kingdom, and to the new Jerusalem, the city of the living God ; we are come to that which has perfected the felicity of the just now abiding in his bosom, and have the hope of fellow-heirship in glory with the whole company of his saved people. These are the privileges, and these the eternal hopes, which I implore you, says the Apostle, not to cast away.

The treatment of this subject is very simple. St. Paul presents to us, in the first place, the Jewish dispensation, tracing distinctly its three leading features. He contrasts with it, in the second place, the Christian dispensation, with its present privileges and future hopes ; he reminds us also who they are, with whom these privileges and hopes are shared.

I. For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words ; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more : (for they WERE NOT ABLE TO BEAR that which was commanded, IF EVEN a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart : and so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake.)

This slight alteration in the rendering, puts us in possession of the evident meaning of St. Paul. His intention is to tell us, not that Israel was disobedient, but that they were overwhelmed with dread ; that the accompaniments of Sinai, and the threatening of death even to the unintelligent animal, inspired every one, not excepting Moses, with fear for his own life. We cannot read them, however superficially, without discerning at once the features of the Mosaic economy. It was a CARNAL dispensation, one addressed to the senses. The mount on which God had

descended for the purpose of giving the law, was palpable ; "might be touched." This feature moreover thoroughly pervaded it; the peculiar worship which it prescribed was little more than a round of outward forms and ceremonies. It was a dispensation of **OBSCURITY**, revealing very little of the grace and goodness of God, and shrouding his character in gloom. This was very strikingly shewn out by the "blackness and darkness" which accompanied his descent on Mount Sinai. "Lo, I come unto thee," he said to Moses, "in a thick cloud." On the morning of the third day accordingly, there was "a thick cloud on the mount," which "covered it six days; and on the seventh day he called unto Moses out of the midst of the cloud." We read also that whilst the awe-struck "people stood afar off, Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was."¹ His glory seemed then to be to hide himself, that the creature finding its God inaccessible, might learn to know its guilty and apostate condition. It was finally, in consequence of this, a dispensation of **TERROR AND BONDAGE**. This feature was stamped on all the accompaniments of Sinai; on "the mount that...burned with fire," on the "tempest," on "the sound of the trumpet," so "exceedingly loud that all the people that was in the camp trembled,"² and finally, on that tremendous "voice of words," which they that heard once, entreated that they might never hear again. For they were not able to bear its awful severity; "if we hear the voice of the Lord our God any more," they said, "then we shall die."³ Nor is it a cause of surprise that they should have felt and spoken in this manner. The creature was kept at such an awful distance that if even an animal should unintentionally approach, it was to be stoned or thrust through with a dart; and the sight of God's glory was so terrible that the mediator himself was paralyzed with dread. It was God's intention indeed that it should be so; he designed to fill both Moses and Israel with this fear, that they might learn to know his holiness and irreconcilable enmity to sin. Such was the dispensation, says St. Paul to

¹ Exodus xix. 9. xxiv. 16. xx. 21. ² Exodus xix. 16. ³ Deuteronomy v. 25.

the Hebrews, under which our fathers were placed : but we are now come to something better. The better thing appears in the concluding words of the text.

II. *But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company, THE JOYFUL ASSEMBLY OF ANGELS, and to the Church of the FIRST-BORN ONES, which are written in heaven, and TO THE JUDGE, THE GOD OF ALL, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.*

These changes of the rendering seem slight but are important. The construction of the original requires the first; and the second is a more faithful translation of the word used by the Apostle, which is plural and not singular. The third alteration is made on higher grounds, the spirit of the whole passage demands it. It is not the Apostle's object here to speak of God as a Judge; his intention in fact, is the very opposite. He means to tell us, as one of the most attractive exhibitions of gospel-grace, that the Almighty, to those that trust in him, sinks his character of Judge in that of God and Father. We have in the whole passage, as is usual in the impassioned style of St. Paul, many things set down without any exact arrangement. To divide it, will conduce therefore to our better understanding of its contents. On minute consideration, three things present themselves to our notice.

1st. The present privileges of the gospel-dispensation appear in the words which we have now read. The new covenant with the Son of God for its Mediator, and his precious blood to give peace to the conscience, is the sum and substance of these privileges. God made a covenant with our fathers, says St. Paul to the Hebrews; the tenor of it was, obey and live, disobey and die. Moses was the mediator of that covenant, for he brought to them the words of the Lord, and carried back their promise of observing

them; he was also their channel of communication with heaven, for he "brought them out of the camp to meet with God," in the midst of Sinai's thunders.¹ But remember, the Apostle would add, the character of his mediation. He never spake, save to the obedient, a word of grace or mercy; he had only commands to give, and curses to pronounce on those who should refuse to observe them. These curses moreover have been fearfully accomplished, as the history of our perverse and disobedient nation testifies. But this covenant of death, the Apostle continues, is now superseded by a covenant of everlasting life. Jesus the Son of God has borne the transgressions of the guilty, and has obeyed on their behalf his Father's holy law. And God, having intimated his acceptance of this work of atonement and obedience by raising him from the dead and exalting him to his right hand, proclaims now in his name, the forgiveness of all iniquity and his eternal favour. Jesus is also the Mediator of this covenant, our channel of communication with heaven; he has brought this word of mercy from the bosom of the Father, and invites us to draw near, putting our unfeigned trust in it. We need not shrink back because we are conscious of sin; the blood of his covenant was shed to take away sin, and is sprinkled before the mercy-seat above, obtaining the sinner's pardon continually. Let it be sprinkled on our hearts also, and let us draw near, assured of God's mercy and confiding in his Fatherly love. This blood may well encourage us to do so, adds the Apostle kindling with his theme; it "speaketh better things than that of Abel." His blood cried to God for vengeance, while it tormented the conscience of his murderer. It brought down the Divine sentence on his guilty brother, and was also the execution of that sentence. God said that he should be "a fugitive and a vagabond," and conscience made him so. He became a restless wanderer from the burden of conscious guilt; and imagining that he read in every fellow-man's countenance a secret design to slay him, he fled from his own shadow.² How very different is the voice of the

¹ Exodus xix. 7, 8, 16, 17.

² Genesis iv. 10—14.

blood of Jesus! Though he was slain by us the sons of men, his blood now presented on high, pleads on our behalf with God. It tells HIM that his law has been magnified by obedience unto death, and that our curse has been borne to the uttermost, beseeching him to receive the guilty once more to his paternal favour. And because it thus pleads above and is accepted in its pleading, it speaks peace also to our guilty consciences. It tells us that God rests satisfied with the sacrifice of his slain Son, that sin is put away, that Divine favour is obtained; it bids us therefore dismiss all fear, and draw near to God as children; and speaking thus to God on man's behalf, and to man on God's behalf, Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant, brings God and his revolted creature together once again. Yea, He unites them never more to be separated, in perpetual amity and love. To be possessed of such a covenant, with such a Mediator, and such precious blood to confide in, is the present privilege of the Christian dispensation: the Hebrews possessed it in their day, and we have it equally in ours. Oh who may tell its priceless, its inestimable worth!

2nd. The glorious hopes which the gospel inspires, appear also in the words before us. The prospect of coming to Mount Zion and to the new Jerusalem the city of the living God, "when the Son of Man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him,"¹ is the sum and substance of these hopes. Mount Zion was David's royal habitation; it was also the site of the temple which Solomon built to the Lord. "Beautiful for situation," says the Psalmist, "the joy of the whole earth, is Mount Zion; on her northern quarters are the buildings of the great King."² "Walk about Zion," he says again, "and consider her palaces," i.e. the palaces of God and the King; "for this God is our God for ever and ever."³ The confidence expressed in these last words shall yet be fully justified; for Christ is the successor of David. "The Lord God shall give unto him," said the angel, "the throne of his father David; and he shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of his kingdom there

¹ Matthew xxv. 31. ² Psalms xlviii. 2. ³ Horeley. ⁴ Psalms xlviii. 12—14.

shall be no end."¹ And when God shall fulfil his promise of gathering Israel again, and setting them on high above all the nations of the earth, he shall fulfil this word also. Christ the Son of David shall then reign in Mount Zion, ruling from that hill of glorious beauty the nation which rules the world; and the whole earth shall be one theocracy under HIM its absolute Autocrat. The prophet Isaiah has expressly declared these things. He has told us that "the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord of Hosts shall reign in MOUNT ZION, and in Jerusalem;" that Israel gathered again in his mercy, shall shout for joy, exclaiming, "O Lord, thou art my God; I will exalt thee, I will praise thy name;" that the nations of the earth shall gladly learn his ways and submit to his righteous rule, "for out of ZION shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem."² These Scripture-declarations explain the words of the text. To be come to Mount Zion, is to have the blessed hope set before us, of beholding in that day the majesty of the crowned Redeemer, and of sitting with him on his throne. For he shall put this honour on his saints. They shall be assessors with him, his delegates, and the ministers of his power. We learn this from their song recorded in the Apocalypse: "Thou hast made us... KINGS...and we shall reign on the earth."³ This song is an inspired commentary on the words which we are now considering. "Ye are come unto Mount Zion," says St. Paul; ye have the promise of this royal dignity, this eternal exaltation with your Lord.

"The city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem" is also mentioned in the text. We have already seen that this is the city which Abraham looked for;⁴ which the beloved Apostle saw descending out of heaven from God;⁵ which is destined as the eternal and glorious abode of the Saviour and his saved people. Glorious abode indeed! "I saw no temple therein," says St. John, "for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it;" it had also "no need

¹ Luke i. 32, 33. ² Isaiah xxiv. 23.. xxv. 1. ii. 2-4. ³ Revelation v. 9, 10.

⁴ Hebrews xi. 10.

⁵ Revelation xxi. 2.

of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it; for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof."¹ No Shekinah shall be there: its blessed inhabitants shall be privileged with something far better, even the personal presence of Immanuel, who shall speak with them, "face to face, as a man speaketh with his friend." This city, as we have seen, shall come down from heaven, and be the eternal communication in the day of glory, between the blessed inhabitants of earth below, and the Father of blessing above. For God shall no longer hide himself from man; heaven shall be opened in that day,² and things shall be as once they were

"Ere sorrow came, or sin had drawn
"Twixt man and heaven her curtain yet."

'To be come to this city of God then is to have this blessed hope set before us, the hope of seeing Immanuel face to face, of dwelling beside him, of delighting ourselves eternally in fellowship with our exalted Redeemer. This hope, let me observe, differs somewhat from the former. Mount Zion presents to the mind a crown, a sceptre, and a kingdom, and fills us with the expectation of GLORY. But to be come to the city in which Jesus shall dwell, suggests rather the idea of HOLY BLESSEDNESS; blessedness derived from seeing him who died for us, and knowing him as our friend and brother; such blessedness as St. John enjoyed, when he leant on his breast at supper. Dare we say that the latter hope appears almost the purer of the two? It is well to be exalted with the sceptred King, but methinks it is even better to have his bosom as our resting-place, and to be known for ever as the people whom Jesus loves.

This throne of glory and abode of endless blessedness shall be revealed, as we know from other Scriptures, when Jesus comes the second time. And he comes attended, for he declares expressly that "all the holy angels" shall be "with him." Heaven shall be emptied of its seraph-hosts in that day of glory; they shall all be attendant on the Saviour,

¹ Revelation xxi. 22, 23.

² John i. 51.

from Gabriel who stands in the presence of God, down to the lowest of those shining ones who do his bidding. Jesus then shall have a goodly as well as a glorious retinue, for no human arithmetic may number the angels of light. "Thousand thousands ministered unto him," says the prophet, describing this day of the Saviour's revelation as he saw it in prophetic vision, "and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him."¹ And we read accordingly in the text, of "myriads," the joyful assembly of angels." On every solemn occasion hitherto, the Son of God has been attended by these glorious hosts. They were with him at the creation of the world, and then also they were "a joyful assembly." "Where wast thou" the Almighty demands of Job, "when I laid the foundations of the earth?...when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy?"² They were with him when he descended on Sinai. "The Lord came from Sinai," we read, "and shined forth from Mount Paran; he came with ten thousands of holy ones."³ We do not read however that they were then "a joyful assembly." The occasion was glorious indeed, but it was also sad and mournful; the law behoved to enter "that the offence might abound." But in the adorable mercy of God, as the Apostle in the Scripture just cited goes on to tell us, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound."⁴ We see not indeed the fulness of this at present. But when Jesus shall come the second time, and spoil death and the grave of their prey, and gather together in one the whole company of his saved people, and cast Satan their enemy into the burning lake, and reveal the blessedness and glory of that kingdom which has been prepared for them since the world began, the grace of God shall be displayed to the view of astonished creation, in all its largeness and inconceivably vast amount. That day shall be indeed a jubilee to his attendant angels. There is joy in their pure and gentle bosoms over even "one sinner that repenteth;"⁵ what then shall be their extacy when they behold "a multitude which

¹ Daniel vii. 10, 13, 14. ² Original of text. ³ Job xxxviii. 1, 4, 7.

⁴ Deuteronomy xxxiii. 2. Septuagint. ⁵ Romans v. 20. ⁶ Luke xv. 10.

no man can number,"¹ snatched as brands from the burning, and prepared for the mansions of the blessed! Nor is this all: they have a nobler cause of joy. Jesus their Creator,² and Lord is the object of their fervent love. They ministered to him in the wilderness, they comforted him in Gethsemane, they hovered round his cross and sepulchre, they were privileged to roll back the stone that he might rise to immortality, and to sit, one "at the head," and another "at the feet," where his sacred person had lain. Who then may conceive their triumphant gladness in the day which sees him glorified, the joy with which they shall stand in his presence, the delight with which they shall execute his word! "Ye are come" says St. Paul, addressing the Hebrews and us, to this innumerable and "joyful assembly." Those who minister to Jesus in that day, shall minister to you also, guiding your steps to Mount Zion, opening for you the gates of the eternal city, marshalling your way into the palace of the King. Such are the hopes of the blessed gospel. It not only tells of Christ's accomplished sacrifice, and invites us to put our trust in it, but promises that if we do so, we shall yet be exalted to his throne, and abide with him in his holy city. He will make us rulers also over all that he hath: his servants shall serve us, his ministers shall await our pleasure.

3rd. The text tells us also that we share these privileges and hopes in common with "the Church of the first-born ones," which are enrolled in heaven, and have God for their Father, and "the spirits of just men" now "made perfect," and resting in his bosom. I believe that the expression "first-born" has reference to resurrection to life, and that "the Church of the first-born ones," are those who, in the language of the Saviour, "shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead."³ Christ himself is called "the first-born from the dead,"⁴ because he was the first to leave the grave; and those who shall reign with him on Mount Zion and dwell with him in his holy city, shall have in like manner, a priority in resur-

¹ Revelation vii. 9.² Colossians i. 16.³ Luke xx. 35.⁴ Colossians i. 18.

rection over the rest of mankind. "Blessed and holy is he" says St. John, "that hath part in the first resurrection... they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him."¹ In being come then to Mount Zion and to the holy Jerusalem, says St. Paul, ye have the hope of fellowship with the whole company of God's saved people, the hope of rising and inheriting along with them, when the grave shall yield up its prey. This mercy is sure to all the seed of promise; the least of them is not forgotten before God, their names are "written in heaven," in the book of life. This book of life moreover is the loving remembrance of a Father; the Judge is the God of them all. Their plea in their several generations has been "Enter not into judgment with thy servant, oh Lord;"² they have fled for refuge, as creatures lost in themselves, to his mercy revealed in the Redeemer; and this plea has been allowed, this confidence has been accepted. The Most High shall not deal with them as a Judge, for he has cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. He shall deal with them as a God and Father, raising in glory that which was sown in dishonour, causing also in his abundant mercy, their corruptible to put on incorruption, and their mortal, immortality. And if you, the Apostle would say, are now fleeing for refuge to the precious blood of sprinkling, the Judge will be your God also, and will deal with you as with them; for his saints shall be raised in one body, and in one body shall be glorified. The reward of each individual, let me remark, shall thus be doubled in amount; he shall see all the faithful of the earth beside him; they shall also share in his joy and he shall share in theirs. Oh blessed fellowship! Abel, God's first martyr; Noah, the second father of the race of man; Abraham, the father of the faithful; Jacob, with the tears of earthly sorrow wiped for ever from his eyes; Moses, the giver of God's law; and Elijah, its undaunted restorer—shall meet in that glorious and longed for day, with Stephen the first martyr of the risen Jesus, with Simon Peter who for his sake was crucified with his head to the earth, with

¹ Revelation xx. 6.² Psalms cxliii. 2.

Paul who trod soon after in his brother's bloody footsteps, with all those sainted men of whom the world has not been worthy, with us also if we are found faithful to the Lord. At the command of the same Saviour, shall they and we take our bodies again, and rejoicing together, ascend to meet him in the air. The sight of Immanuel face to face, shall then fill every eye; and swallowed up in admiration of his uncreated and perfect beauty, we shall have no room left for any other object.

The privileges which the gospel brings to us now, are also shared in common; "Ye are come" St. Paul tells the Hebrews, "to the spirits of just men made perfect." Let us inquire into the meaning of this expression. It might signify, exalted to a state of final reward. But this idea has been expressed already, for resurrection is the reward of the just. We must also observe the expressions, "first-born ones" and "spirits of just men." Do not these words describe the company of the saved in two conditions? Do they not speak of them as yet they shall be, viz. raised in glory, and also as they now are, viz. waiting disembodied in the bosom of God above? I apprehend that it is so. St. Paul's evident design is to tell us that as we shall one day be glorified with the just men of whom he has been speaking, so we are blessed at this instant, with the same gospel-privileges. This throws most important light on the meaning of the phrase, "made perfect." It cannot signify moral perfectness; such a statement would have no meaning in this connection. The idea which is really contained in it, has been already repeatedly before us. St. Paul has expressly declared to the Hebrews, and in every variety of language, that the sacrifices and services of their fathers never could make the worshipper "PERFECT AS PERTAINING TO THE CONSCIENCE," i.e. never were able to minister peace with God. He has declared most distinctly that Christ offered his one atoning sacrifice, not for those only who should come after him, but for them who had gone before; that he came to deliver his people in the world of spirits; that their peace even there, was not perfected till they heard of his

finished work.¹ It is perfected now, says the Apostle; they have heard of the deace accomplished at Jerusalem, and their joy is full. And ye, he continues in the words before us, have the same blessed privileges with them; ye hear that gospel on earth which comforts the hearts of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob in heaven. Let me observe in connection with this, that there is an interpretation of the last words of the text, different from that which has been given in this discourse. Some very eminent expositors tell us that the blood of Christ "speaketh better things than that of Abel," because it ministers a peace which the sacrifices of all preceding dispensations, from the days of Abel downward, never were able for a moment to give. If this interpretation be adopted, it elucidates the meaning of the statement which we are now considering, in the most beautiful and satisfactory manner. Abel complied with all the Divine injunctions, and offered the sacrifices which God prescribed. Noah in his day, followed this righteous example; Abraham also did so, with Isaac and Jacob after him; Moses the man of God, and all the just who followed in the several generations of Israel, observed the same things. But though all was done, these just men were conscious that the end was not attained, that God was not propitiated. They passed into the disembodied state; and though they had never failed during their earthly course, in burnt offering and sacrifice, they were conscious even then, that something was lacking still: HIS PRECIOUS BLOOD OF SPRINKLING HAS SUPPLIED THAT LACK, says St. Paul, IT HAS PERFECTED THEIR FELICITY. Let the same blood, he adds, pacify your consciences; it is as much for you as for them. In what a light does this present to us the unspeakable value of Christ's sacrifice! What contempt does it pour on all the doings of the creature! They evince indeed his gratitude for salvation achieved, but they are utterly powerless to achieve it. I really cannot tell whether this interpretation of St. Paul's words, or that formerly given, is to be preferred. Both contain precious truth and minister blessed consolation.

¹ Hebrews ix. 9, 26. ii. 15.

But is it possible, it may be asked, that Abraham the friend of God, and Moses his faithful servant, and Elijah who passed into his presence without tasting death, were not perfected in felicity when they entered the invisible world? I have no doubt that the unbelieving Hebrews would ask this question, and that nothing could be more offensive to their feelings than the doctrine which has just been laid down. What! They would contemptuously exclaim, Did the Nazarene behave to shed his blood before even our sainted Moses could be perfectly blessed? Yes, answers the fearless Apostle, "it behoved Christ to suffer," before even Moses could be perfected. Some among ourselves however may ask the question for different reasons; let us therefore give a clear and distinct reply to it. To say that these just men were not perfected, is not to say that they were unhappy; felicity is imperfect as long as it admits of increase. From what we know to have been their condition in this world, we may understand something of their condition in the world of spirits previous to incarnation and atonement. God had said that he would send his Son to expiate their sins; and they relied on the Divine assurance. But to look forward to expiation as something yet to be, and to look back on it as a thing accomplished, are conditions of spirit as different as faith differs from enjoyment, and hope from eternal praise. Besides, we have had positive proof that during their earthly course, they did not know God as a Father.¹ And as it was with them on earth, so it was, I believe, when they left it: they knew God as a Friend and a Master, but that was the limit of their knowledge. But when incarnation was accomplished and expiation finished, the fulness of Godhead's grace and mercy burst on their astonished view: they drew nigh to God as they had never yet drawn nigh to him, they laid their heads upon a Father's breast. I feel assured that this is true. God could not in the nature of things be known as a Father, till he was revealed as the Father of Jesus. "I bow my knees," says St. Paul, "unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, OF WHOM

¹ Vol. I. pp. 144, 5; 456, 7.

the whole family IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH is named."¹ For the saints of all former dispensations are one family now with the saints of the present: we are come to them, and they are made perfect with us.²

THESE hopes and privileges of the Christian dispensation are the birthright of every baptized man. If this were not so, the warning of the context would have no meaning. A birthright is something freely bestowed; it excludes the very idea of merit or desert. Abraham's blessing was in this way Esau's birthright; it belonged to him simply because he was Isaac's son. And the grace of the Christian covenant is ours after the same manner; our baptism in unconscious infancy was God's declaration that forgiveness through Christ's sacrifice, the gift of the Holy Ghost, and his own fatherly love, were freely and unconditionally bestowed on us. He laid us under the obligation of receiving this grace and walking in it; he added the promise of the eternal glories of the kingdom. This then is our gospel-birthright; and to neglect these privileges and hopes for the world, is, as we were warned already, to sell this birthright for a morsel of meat. The words of the text and context, if rendered more literally, throw still further light on this matter. Take heed, says the Apostle, that you follow not the example of him "who sold HIS FIRST-BORN-RIGHTS³...for ye are come to the Church of THE FIRST-BORN-ONES." Can anything be plainer than this language? It tells us that the hope of resurrection to eternal glory is our first-born-right, the right which we may sell. Nor is this all; the first-born ones to whom we are come, are said to be "written in heaven." This expression was explained already, the Judge is the God of them all. Let us take an example of this from the Old Testament. "Blot me, I pray thee," said Moses to the Lord, "out of thy book which thou hast written." For Jehovah was the God of Moses and of Israel, their names were in his book. To the same effect are the words of the New Testament; "I will not blot out his name," says Jesus

¹ Ephesians iii. 14, 15.

² Comp. text with Hebrews xi. 40.

³ Rheims version.

to him "that overcometh," "out of the book of life."¹ For the God of Israel is now the God of the baptized; we are all remembered before him in mercy and fatherly love. But we may come short of this mercy. "Whosoever hath sinned against me," said the Lord to Moses, "him will I blot out of my book."² And the promise of the Saviour to which we have just referred, contains by implication, the same fearful threatening now. The grace of baptism then may be sinned away; and instead of the Judge being our God, the God of his people may judge and sentence us to death. A life of transgression and unbelief shall have this fearful result at last; we shall thus compel Him whom we might have known as a Father, to arm against us the terrors of judicial wrath. Let these solemn considerations be deeply impressed on our minds. Let us remember on the one hand, that the blessed privileges and glorious hopes of the text are ours in the free gift of God; let us never forget on the other, that we may come short of them through unbelief and sin; and let us treasure up in our hearts the warning of the context, "Looking diligently" lest we "fail of the grace of God." May he, of his infinite mercy, incline our hearts so to do!

¹ Revelation iii. 5.² Exodus xxxii. 32, 33.*See Appendix, Note U.*

LECTURE XXVII.

Hebrews xii. 25—29.

“ See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven: whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain. Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire.”

WE have just had set before us our glorious gospel-birth-right; and St. Paul has finished his exposition of it by declaring that Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant is speaking peace to us by His blood. This statement is now followed up by a suitable exhortation, not to refuse “him that speaketh,” and by a solemn warning that those who do so, cannot possibly escape. For they escaped not, says the Apostle, who refused God’s word when he spake on earth; and how then, he asks, shall we escape if we turn away from that word now delivered to us from heaven? When Christ spake on Sinai, the text continues, his voice “shook the earth,” but he has declared that a time is coming when he will shake the heavens also, when every thing created shall pass away, and the eternal kingdom alone shall survive the dreadful shock. It is our wisdom therefore, the Apostle

thus concludes his argument, since we are come to the Church of the first-born ones, the heirs of this kingdom, to have grace that we may serve God acceptably and be prepared for its eternal glories. For he who is a Father to them that trust in him, is the Judge and Destroyer of his enemies.

These exhortations, though perfectly similar in their whole strain to those which have preceded them, contain nevertheless new and most deeply important matter. Let us consider in the first place, the apostolic statement that refusal to hearken to the gospel shall bring down a heavier doom that was incurred by disobedience to the law. Let us consider in the second place, the statement which succeeds it, that every thing created shall pass away and the kingdom of Christ shall be left the only survivor. We shall thus be taught most emphatically in the third place, what in such solemn circumstances is the wisdom of baptized men.

I. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven.

The speaking on earth and speaking from heaven are here contrasted, that the superior excellence of the latter may at once appear. The speaking on earth was from a material mountain; it was heard from the midst of a dark and thick cloud; its accompaniments were of the most awful and terrifying description. And these things, as we saw in the last lecture, shewed forth the character of the dispensation which it introduced. It was addressed to the senses; it was a dispensation of obscurity; it filled men with the spirit of bondage. God's message to us in the blessed gospel, is the very reverse of all this. It is addressed to faith and not to sense; it is a word of light, and without obscurity; it fills him who believes it, with peace and liberty and joy. The argument of the words before us, is founded on this manifest superiority of the gospel to the law. The speaking on

Sinai, says the Apostle, was calculated rather to repel from God than to draw to him; and yet those escaped not who refused it. The speaking with which we are privileged, he continues, is addressed to the heart, and fitted by its gracious character, to win that heart to God; how then shall we escape, if we refuse to hear and obey! This will appear more fully if we now give the same particular consideration to those three features of the gospel which have just been mentioned, which we bestowed in the last lecture, on the opposite features of the law.

1st. It is a word "from heaven," whilst the other was uttered "on earth," i.e. it is addressed to faith, whilst the other appealed to the senses. Mount Sinai "might be touched," and as His voice was heard from the top of it in thunder, Israel had the evidence of their senses that God was speaking to them. But no one has been in heaven, has seen God or can see him, has heard or can hear Christ speaking from the glory in which he is seated now. "Though we have known Christ after the flesh," says St. Paul, "yet now henceforth know we him no more;"¹ he is the object now of faith and not of sense. And the same thing is true of his message. It proclaims the love of God, the free remission of sin, and the Divine invitation and welcome to draw near to him as a Father and live. But these things are proclaimed in "a still, small voice," unaccompanied by any signs of Divine majesty and glory. Even in the days of Christ and his apostles, when signs attended the word, they were signs of love and mercy to speak to the hearts of men, and not of terrible power to overwhelm their senses. And now when all signs are withdrawn, and we hear a man like ourselves speaking to us, unbelief derides the word; I have no evidence whatever, says the unbeliever, that this message comes from heaven. The evidence is to faith; the energy of the word demonstrates from whom the word has proceeded. It commends itself to the conscience; it searches the heart; it draws the affections to God; it convinces of sin and turns us from it to the service of truth

¹ II Corinthians v. 16.

and righteousness. These evidences of Divinity in the gospel-message are far more worthy of God than all the thunders of Sinai; they demonstrated power merely, but these demonstrate character. They are also suited to a dispensation which is spiritual, in which God is dealing with the heart.

2nd. The gospel-message is one of light, whilst the law was all darkness and obscurity; "the darkness is past," says St. John, "and the true light now shineth."¹ For this message is the word of "Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant," the voice of his blood of sprinkling. It tells that God had so loved us as to send his Son to die on our behalf, that sin is taken away, that God is propitiated, that we may now look for his mercy unto eternal life. Abel's blood had no such cheering testimony, Abel's sacrifice was equally powerless to console. But the precious blood of sprinkling declares these things plainly and unambiguously; they are written as with a sunbeam in the gospel; "GOD IS LIGHT," says St. John, "AND IN HIM IS NO DARKNESS AT ALL."² And for any one therefore who is privileged with that gospel, to complain that he can find no assured evidence of the love of God or of the forgiveness of his sins, is as if we beheld a man walking in the light of the meridian sun, and heard him complaining that he could not see! If Hezekiah and the saints of old were destitute of this assured peace, the character of their dispensation was the cause; the sun of righteousness was obscured by a cloud. But that cloud, blessed be God, is now rolled away; and, relieved from its interposing gloom, we can behold his glorious love and everlasting mercy shining in the face of Jesus. If then we are not able to do so, and to rejoice in him as our Father, it is because our eyes are shut; because, in the words of the same Apostle, "THE LIGHT SHINETH IN DARKNESS, AND THE DARKNESS" COMPREHENDETH "IT NOT."³

3rd. The gospel-dispensation being one of light, is one also of peace and joy, whilst the law ministered to bondage. After what has just been said, this requires little elucidation.

¹ I John ii. 8.² I John i. 5.³ John i. 5.

Surely it must minister both peace and joy to read God's love to us in the cross of his dear Son, to read his everlasting mercy there, and to draw this blessed conclusion, "how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"¹ The light and joy of the gospel have this indissoluble connection, because, in the language of the Saviour, it is "the light of life;"² it discovers no "sights of woe," no "regions of horror," but calms and tranquillizes the spirit with visions of eternal peace. This blessed character belongs to it that it may effect its destined object. For while the law repelled man from his Creator by its overwhelming terrors, God's design by the gospel is to bring us to himself, that we may live.

If we compare the text and context with the narratives of the evangelists, we shall find a most beautiful illustration of the two points which we have just considered, the darkness and bondage of the law, the light and peace of the gospel. When God spake on Sinai, out of the thick cloud and from the midst of the terrible fire, the people half dead with affright, looked to Moses to comfort them. "Fear not,"³ said the mediator of the old covenant, but his pale countenance belied his words; for he was himself paralyzed with dread, and was constrained to confess, "I exceedingly fear and quake." How glorious is the contrast presented by the scene on Mount Tabor! There also God spake from a cloud, but it was a bright cloud. There also there was fear, for the disciples being still in mortal flesh, "fell on their faces" before openly-manifested Deity. But what was it which aroused them from their trance? They felt a hand touch them; they looked up and saw the placid countenance of the unaffrighted Jesus; they heard the silver tones of his voice of kindness, "Arise, and be not afraid."⁴ Oh what emphasis of meaning does this give to the words of the context! It is indeed a blessed privilege to be "come to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant," for his word to the terrified disciples on that memorable occasion, is his word still to as many as seek his face in truth. And he does not

¹ Romans viii. 32. ² John viii. 12. ³ Exodus xx. 20. ⁴ Matthew xvii. 1-7.

speaking that word as the terrified Moses spake it, for the bright cloud has now succeeded the "blackness and darkness and tempest." At the foot of Sinai, it was impossible to dismiss fear. But it was possible to dismiss it on Tabor, and it is possible to dismiss it now. For in the cross of him who bids us do so, we read in letters of light that the cause of fear is gone.

These considerations demonstrate in a most striking manner the truth of the argument of the text. If God is now speaking to our hearts and consciences by the full revelation of his infinite goodness and inviting us to know and confide in him as a Father, surely this abundant mercy must increase our obligation to hearken to him. If when he spake to Israel through the senses, shrouded also in gloom and surrounded with terror, they escaped not in refusing his word, because their God and Creator had spoken and it was their bounden duty to obey, surely our judgment is decided who outrage in refusing to hearken, a Father and gracious Redeemer. If Israel had no plea to present, when the thunders of Sinai did not teach them to obey the Lord, surely we must stand speechless and confounded, if it shall appear in the day of reckoning that even the cross of the Saviour has failed to teach this lesson to our stubborn and rebellious hearts.

II. The Apostle proceeds to set forth the glories of that day;—

Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but also heaven. And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things WHICH CAN BE SHAKEN, as of things that are made, that those things WHICH CANNOT BE SHAKEN may remain.

I have rendered these words according to what I believe to be the meaning of the writer; he is evidently contrasting things which admit of being shaken with those which are immoveable. The Rheims version renders them accordingly,

"the translation of moveable things, that those may remain which are unmoveable." Our translators also have rendered the latter phrase by the words "which cannot be shaken;" and as the two phrases are identical in the original, their meanings must correspond.

It was the boast of the unbelieving Hebrews against their Christian brethren, that the dispensation of Moses had been introduced and attested by demonstrations of Divine Majesty which the Saviour and his apostles had utterly failed to exhibit. Their boast is vain, answers the Apostle. It is indeed true that when Messiah spake on Sinai, "his voice shook the earth," and that instead of shaking the earth now, he is addressing men as the Mediator of the new covenant and speaking peace to them by his blood. But it shall not be always so. The dispensation of Moses was ushered in with signs of power and demonstrations of terrible majesty, and the dispensation of Christ shall close with the exhibition of the same wonders. Yea the glories of that closing scene shall make the thunders of Sinai be forgotten: these thunders affected the earth only; but the heaven also, in the day that is coming, shall be shaken and pass away. St. Paul declares that the Lord has promised this; and he evidently refers, in saying so, to the words of Haggai. For that prophet announces God's purpose yet once again to shake not the earth only, but the heavens also, the sea and the dry land; and to shake all nations, that the Desire of all nations may come. This purpose is announced again with yet further explanation of its import. The throne of kingdoms is to be overthrown, the strength of the kingdoms of the heathen is to be destroyed, the horses and their riders are to come down, "every one by the sword of his brother."¹ All this sufficiently explains the nature of the shaking referred to in the words before us. It is the breaking up, in the first place, of the social and political framework of the earth. "Behold, the Lord maketh the earth empty," says Isaiah, "and maketh it waste, and turneth it upside down, and scattereth abroad the inhabitants thereof." He then goes

¹ Haggai ii. 6, 7, 21, 22.

on to prophesy that human society shall be utterly disorganized; that priest and people, master and servant, mistress and maid, lender and borrower, shall be as one; that all distinction between man and man shall be confounded. And this shall prepare the way, he announces, for the Lord of hosts setting up his throne in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem.¹ This testimony is confirmed in the mouth of other prophets also. "I will overturn, overturn, overturn," says God speaking by Ezekiel, "until he come whose right it is; and I will give it him."² And Jesus has described in the very same terms the days that shall usher in his kingdom. He has spoken of the "distress of nations," the "perplexity" of mankind, the failing of men's hearts for fear, and the shaking of the powers of heaven.³ But this shaking is, in the second place, to be understood literally. When God spake on Sinai, he shook material things, even this material earth. And even so, at the second utterance of his dreadful voice, the heavens and earth which now are shall pass away, and a new creation shall succeed them, "wherein dwelleth righteousness." "They shall perish," says the Psalmist; "the heavens shall pass away with a great noise," says St. Peter, "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up," and "all these things shall be dissolved."⁴ This view of the meaning of the text, is in perfect harmony, let me remark, with St. Paul's interpretation of the word "once more." It signifies, he tells us, that the shaking still intended by the Lord, shall affect every thing which admits of being moved. And what things admit of being moved? "Things which are made," is the answer, things set up by man, or even created by God. They are all doomed to pass away; every thing on which the eye now rests, is under the sentence of destruction. God has pronounced it on all human institutions, social and political, on all the monuments of human wisdom and art, on human power and glory, on man's dignity, wealth, and fame. "Love not the world;" says St. John,... "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes,

¹ Isaiah xxiv. 1, 2, 23.² Ezekiel xxi. 27.³ Luke xxi. 25—27.⁴ Psalm cii. 26.; II Peter iii. 10, 11.

the pride of life...the world passeth away."¹ The same sentence has been pronounced on this material creation. The heavens and earth which are now, though the work of God's own hand, shall pass away and be removed in the dreadful day that is coming, "as things which have ended their course"² and served their temporary purpose. The convulsions of that day, as the text goes on to tell us, shall try every thing "of what sort it is." If it admits of being shaken, it shall totter and fall under their violence; if it abides them and stands still in its strength, it shall be proved thereby to be immoveable. This land is visited by a hurricane of the most appalling character. Edifices of every description, some of which have stood for ages and proved hitherto tempest-proof, totter and fall under its fury; and one erection alone survives. We esteem that erection, in consequence, to be secure against every future storm; what has survived so dreadful a visitation, we say, can never be overthrown. Now this is just the idea which the text sets before us. When the Almighty shook the earth at the giving of the law, the shaking was only partial. But when he shall shake it a second time; when, incapable of saving itself in his powerful grasp, it "shall reel to and fro like a drunkard,"³ every thing shall totter and fall which admits of being shaken, and those things alone shall survive, which are beyond the power of change. To what things, we ask, does such a character belong? Our question is answered in the words that follow; they point out to us also the path of true wisdom.

III. *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be SHAKEN, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear.*

That which cannot be shaken, (for he continues to use the same word) is, according to St. Paul, the kingdom of our Lord and Saviour. This kingdom is to be regarded both as

¹ I John ii. 15, 16.

² Tyndale's and Cranmer's version of the text.

³ Isaiah xxiv. 20.

a present and a future thing. Christ is now sitting on the Father's throne, as "the Prince of the kings of the earth,"¹ ruling by his providence in the kingdoms of men, and by his Spirit in the hearts of his people. And he shall yet come in the glory of his Father, and be openly manifested as King and Lord of the whole earth. The kingdom thus given to Christ is in the nature of things immoveable. The heathen may rage and the people lift up their voice, but it is a vain thing which they imagine; no violence can disenthroned the Saviour, no rebellion can hurl him from his glorious seat. The changes which annihilate other kingdoms, so far from affecting the security of his, are designed by God to prepare the way for its yet future revelation, and to conduce to its eternal establishment. We have learned this from those scriptures to which we have already referred. If God is to shake all nations, it is that the Desire of all nations may come; if the earth is to be made waste and empty, it is that the Lord of hosts may set up his throne in Jerusalem; if diadems are to be removed and earthly thrones overturned, it is that he whose right it is may take his own; if the powers of heaven are to be shaken, it is that the Son of man may be revealed in the clouds with power and great glory. Nor is this all. If the present heavens and earth are to be dissolved, it is that they may be succeeded by those new heavens and that new earth which shall be the seat of Messiah's kingdom, and the scene of the glories of his reign. That kingdom and reign shall also be eternal; "all people, nations, and languages," shall "serve him;"... "his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away."² But what gives to the kingdom of Messiah this immoveable and eternal character? Its not being among the "things that are made." Man did not set it up; nor did God establish it for any temporary purpose. He established it for an eternal purpose, and has guaranteed its perpetuity by his solemn oath. The throne of Christ is thus as sacred as the being of God; amid the revolutions of nations and crash of worlds, it remains and must remain

¹ Revelation i. 5.² Daniel vii. 14.

unshaken and secure. Yea the Father has sworn and will not repent, that while everlasting ages shall run their course, every knee shall still bow to Jesus and every tongue confess him Lord.

St. Paul tells us that we have received this kingdom, i. e. that we are its subjects now, and have the hope of inheriting it hereafter. We have learned this already. To be come to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant and to his precious blood of sprinkling, is to be the subjects of the kingdom of grace ; to be come to Mount Sion and to the Church of the first-born ones, is to have the hope of the inheritance of glory. He therefore counsels us as those who have received such mercy and have their hearts gladdened by such a hope, to "have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear." It is our meet return for his goodness on the one hand ; it is the only path which shall conduct us to his glory on the other. The solemn truths to which he has just called our attention, give additional point and energy to this injunction. If every created thing is doomed to pass away, and the kingdom of Christ shall alone survive all change ; if every earthly hope is resting on the sand, and that alone which is built on Christ is founded on a rock ; surely we should cleave to our hope in him as our dearest joy and most cherished consolation. Surely, if these things are so, we should pursue "with reverence and godly fear," the way of holiness which leads to this kingdom, looking diligently lest any of us fail of his grace, and come short in the end of the promises of his blessed gospel.

And there is yet another consideration. By neglecting the salvation of God and taking no heed to walk in his ways, we shall not only come short of his kingdom, but fall under his eternal wrath,

For our God is a consuming fire.

This wrath shall be revealed in the day of which we have already spoken ; that day which shall close the Christian dispensation, and cause by its terrible glories, the thunders

of Sinai to be forgotten; that day in which those shall not escape who have turned away from him who spake to them from heaven. The first and last words of the text have thus a close connection together: it is he who now speaks to us from heaven, who shall yet prove a consuming fire. This fearful statement and the language made use of to express it, are both deserving of our most earnest attention. Let us observe what the Apostle does not say, and also what he says; let us mark what his language does not mean, and also what it means. He does not say that *God* is a consuming fire. The Being to whom he ascribes this awful character, is our God, i.e. the God who has loved and received us into his covenant. There is a theology which represents God as loving some and reserving wrath for others; as if love and wrath were opposite and inconsistent manifestations of character. This is a most serious misconception. Malice, which is pleasure in another's misery, is the opposite of love; but wrath, which is displeasure at another's sin, is perfectly consistent with it. There is no malice in God as there is no darkness in light; "as I live," is his solemn protestation, "I HAVE NO PLEASURE IN THE DEATH OF HIM THAT DIETH."¹ But though He is Love, and love "is not easily provoked,"² He is angry every day with men's transgressions and will yet take fearful vengeance on them. Neither does the Apostle say, as his words are sometimes quoted, that *God out of Christ* is a consuming fire. This language is equally misleading. All God's actings, whether of grace or judgment, are in Christ; there is no such Being as God out of Christ. Christ is the meeting-place between God and man, God in Christ is now calling on us to come to him and live. The day moreover is at hand when God in Christ, i.e. God in the person of his Son, (for "the Father judgeth no man,"³) shall take vengeance on such as have refused the gracious invitation. This is distinctly taught in the text: he who speaks to us from heaven, is Christ our God; and "our God is a consuming fire." This important phrase has two significations, and the context must determine its meaning in any

¹ Ezekiel xviii. 32.; xxxiii. 11. ² I Corinthians xiii. 5. ³ John v. 22.

particular place. It signifies sometimes, the God in whose love we have confided, to whose mercy we have fled for refuge, in whose salvation we have hoped. In this sense we find it in Isaiah. "This is our God," is the shout of the redeemed in the glorious morning of the resurrection, "we have waited for him, and he will save us."¹ Is this then its meaning here? Can God ever prove a consuming fire to those who hope in his salvation? Does St. Paul intend to impress upon the Hebrews, you and I have indeed believed on the Saviour, but the result still depends on ourselves; he may yet consume us in his wrath? *NAY, GOD FORBID*; a more fearful, a more impious sentiment can scarcely be conceived. Your sins and your iniquities "will I remember no more," is the solemn assurance of the Almighty to all who have made his mercy their confidence. They have also a nobler motive for obedience than the fear of being consumed by God's wrath; the Spirit which teaches them to cry, Abba Father, writes upon their hearts and minds that Father's blessed law.² But the phrase "our God," in many parts of holy Scripture, signifies simply the God who has loved us and sent his Son to die for us, who has provided for us in him remission of sins, who has set before us the hope of eternal glory. All this may be true, though we are yet despising these blessings; and it is evidently in this sense, and contemplating this fearful possibility, that the Apostle here uses the phrase. He has reminded the Hebrews in the immediate context, that they are come to Mount Sion, the Church of the firstborn-ones, and the blood of sprinkling; he has besought them not to sell their birthright for a morsel of meat. He proceeds in the text, in the same strain. He who has bestowed these privileges upon you, he says, is now speaking to you from heaven, and beseeching you to receive them. Do not imagine that because he is so loving and gracious he cannot be severe, but learn to reverence his Majesty, and to stand in awe of his glorious and fearful name; for this loving, this gracious One is "a consuming fire." The Hebrews might remember one circumstance in

¹ Isaiah xxv. 9.² Hebrews viii. 10—12.

the history of their nation which demonstrated the truth of these words. We read that while the glory of God was still playing round Mount Sinai, he called Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel. They went up into the Mount at his bidding, and were graciously received and entertained by him; "they saw God, and did eat and drink."¹ How winning was this exhibition of grace, how worthy of his people's God! Two of that favoured company however abused this and similar expressions of kindness to their own destruction. Nadab and Abihu the sons of Aaron, seem to have imagined that they might take any liberty with One so gracious, and "offered" accordingly "strange fire before the Lord, which he commanded them not." But alas, they had calculated amiss; "there went out fire from the Lord, and devoured them."² What a lesson is here! The very men who had been eating and drinking in God's presence, found him "a consuming fire." Let us beware then how we esteem him to be placable and facile, and too kind to execute his threatenings; let us take heed how we presume upon our nearness to him, and upon our eating and drinking in his presence, at his holy table. If we are neglecting his salvation in our hearts and taking no heed to walk in his ways, that God who has bestowed on us our gospel-privileges, and spread the table of love that we may eat and drink, will turn round in his wrath and consume us.

We need not ask then what is the part of true wisdom. It is to open our ears and hearts to the word and spirit of Jesus, that we may be taught to serve God here, and prepared for the inheritance of the saints in light and glory hereafter. It is to set our hearts on God's everlasting promises, remembering continually that all present things shall pass away. Blessed is the man who is found thus truly wise! He shall stand secure amid the ruins of a falling world, for his feet are planted on that Rock of ages which is beyond the earthquake's power. And while the wrath of Jesus consumes his enemies on every side, he shall find in the bosom of his love a safe and eternal resting-place. May this wisdom be ours that it may be well with us both now and for ever!

¹ Exodus xxiv. 1. 9—11.² Leviticus x. 1. 2.

LECTURE XXVIII.

Hebrews xiii. 1—6.

“Let brotherly love continue. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body. Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge. Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.”

ST. PAUL has hitherto referred only incidentally to moral duties, having occupied himself entirely in setting forth the glory of Christ, and in exhorting the Hebrews to cleave to him. And when we observe that we are now almost at the close of the epistle, this teaches us in a most striking manner that Christianity is something infinitely more exalted than a moral code, however excellent and pure. But while this is true on the one hand, it is equally true on the other, that the revelations of Christianity have been of the most essential service to morals. By revealing to man his long-forgotten Creator they have imparted new principles of moral action, and added new sanctions to every moral precept; they have in short, established morality on a base on which it never stood or could stand before. In the preceding parts of this epistle St. Paul has laid the foundation of morals, by commending to the Hebrews the knowledge

and love of God; in the verses which we have read now, he proceeds to build the superstructure, shewing them what is the character of that behaviour toward man to which such knowledge and love will necessarily lead. His remarks are brief indeed, but they are comprehensive; the injunctions of these few verses provide for the observance of the whole second table of the law. That we may be made fully aware of this, and have before us the breadth and length of the Christian code of morals, let us now proceed to consider them.

He enjoins, in the first place,

Let brotherly love continue.

It is necessary for our understanding of this precept that we know what "brotherly love" is. The mutual affection of brothers and sisters in a family, results from their common relation to their parents and mutual relation to each other. It is the same in the family of God. Related to him as their common Father above, and mutually related as brethren in Christ, his children love one another. It cannot be otherwise. The sign that we are God's children indeed, is the spirit of adoption sent forth into our hearts. "Because ye are sons," says St. Paul, "God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. Wherefore thou art...a son."¹ This Spirit, as we learn from these words of the Apostle, is the Spirit of Christ. And if it is found in our hearts, leading us after his example, to love our Father in heaven, to trust in him and to obey his voice, we shall very soon discover who they are who love and confide in the same Father, seek his glory and do his will with joy. We shall be conscious of a link between our hearts and theirs, which binds us to none else; they will be the objects of our peculiar affection, of our "brotherly love." Of this, Christ himself is a witness to us. When they told him on one occasion, "Thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee," "he stretched forth

¹ Galatians iv. 6, 7.

his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!...whosoever shall do the will of my Father ...the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."¹ The Hebrews had been distinguished by this sacred principle in their earlier days as a Church, and by the blessed fruits which it brought forth; St. Paul has already assured them that God was "not unrighteous to forget" their "work and labour of love" on behalf of his afflicted saints.² But persecution and affliction might peradventure cause it to wax cold; and the Apostle therefore, "jealous" over their state "with godly jealousy,"³ enjoins them in the words before us, "Let brotherly love continue."

This sacred principle, as we have just seen, is not an inoperative sentiment; St. Paul goes on to speak of its fruits;—

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

We may gather both from the terms of this injunction and from its occurring immediately after an exhortation to brotherly love, that the strangers here intended were not heathens but the people of God. For in that time of extremity, as the persecution raged by turns in different cities, God's people were often constrained to leave their homes and to seek among strangers, an asylum and a hiding-place. Be not forgetful, says St. Paul, to open your doors to these wanderers; and see that you treat them with kindness and courtesy, for your common Father's sake. We have a most beautiful description of this ministry of love in his directions to Timothy. He tells him that a widowed female is to be considered as having a claim on the whole body of the faithful, "if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted."⁴ Let us imagine some servant of God, driven by persecution from his home, and arriving, after long and

¹ Matthew xii. 47—50. ² Hebrews vi. 10. ³ II Corinthians xi. 2.

⁴ I Timothy v. 10.

dusty travel, a stranger in a strange city. He is guided in the providence of God, to a Christian's house, and finds there the blessed shelter of a brother's roof, and the sympathy of a Christian family. They wash his hot and dusty feet, comfort him in his sorrow, and relieve his wants. This was the hospitality which deserved well of the Church, the hospitality here enjoined by St. Paul. He also encourages the Hebrews to it by reminding them that some, by the practice of this virtue, had entertained even angels unawares. They could not be ignorant to what these words referred. Their father Abraham, seeing three strangers approach his tent, courteously received and entertained them. But little did the aged patriarch know, while he did so, that one of these strangers was the Lord of glory in human form, and that the others were his attendant angels. Lot also, while dwelling in churlish Sodom, opened his house to two strangers who came to that city at eventide, little knowing that these strangers were angels of light, sent to warn him of Sodom's fall. And in neither of these cases did this courtesy go unrequited. Before his distinguished guest bade farewell to hospitable Abraham, he suffered him to plead for Sodom, and in answer to his pleading, sent Lot out of the midst of its overthrow. And when Divine vengeance was just bursting on that guilty city, the guests of Lot mercifully laid hold of his hand and guided him, with part of his family, to a place of safety.¹ It may be the same with you, ye Hebrews, says the Apostle; it may be your privilege to bestow the shelter of your roof and the provision of your table on some distinguished servant of Christ, some one justly dear to him for perils, labours, and sufferings encountered in his blessed service. Bestow that shelter then and that provision cheerfully; you shall reap hereafter the rewards of eternal glory. "Be not forgetful" of this duty, for Jesus, on his part, will not forget to say, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."²

The Apostle's blessed theme is not exhausted; the text proceeds,—

¹ Genesis xviii. xix, 1—20.

² Matthew xxv. 40.

Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them.

He has spoken of hospitable and courteous entertainment; but it was not always in the power of the early Christians to shew this kindness to their brethren. These brethren, in bonds for the gospel's sake, might be sequestered from their fellowship, encouragement, and sympathy, in the gloomy recesses of some heathen prison. What in such circumstances, the Hebrews might have asked, can brotherly love do? Let it "remember them that are in bonds," says St. Paul; let it teach you to make their case your own, and to cry to God continually for his presence with them in their captivity, and for deliverance out of it, when his wisdom shall judge it best. He is both willing and able to hear the fervent supplication of love. The blessed Comforter can find his way where no human friend may come, and can turn by his presence the shadow of death into the morning, making the damp and pestilential dungeon a place of joy and praise. And when God sees fit to set his captive free, neither bars, nor gates, nor any devices of security to which the persecutor's cruelty can resort, can stand for a moment in his way. St. Paul had experience of this in his own person. He had found to his unspeakable joy, that bonds, darkness, and a dungeon could not exclude the consolations of heaven, for he had been able at Philippi, when he was "thrust into the inner prison," "bleeding from the Roman rods," to pray at midnight, and sing praises to God.¹ And we have a most glorious example in St. Peter, of the efficacy of the prayer of love, that it indeed "moves the hand that moves the world." He was in the very condition indicated in the text; Herod had cast him into prison; but his brethren made his cause their own, for "prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him." And on the very eve of his being brought forth to death, while he "was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains," and while "the keepers before the door kept the prison," the Lord having their devices in derision "sent his angel," and

¹ Acts xvi. 25.

set his faithful servant free.¹ The Hebrews did not require to be reminded of this touching incident in the early history of their Church, and had therefore abundant encouragement to the practice of this sacred duty.

The precept of brotherly love, let me remark, was the especial charge which Christ left behind him with his people. "A new commandment" he said, "I give unto you, That ye love one another, as I have loved you...By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples."² It was the opinion of the venerable Archbishop Usher, that there were eleven commandments; he considered this new commandment to be superadded to the ten which were delivered originally from Sinai. There is much reason for thinking so. It is not correct to say that the revelation of God's redeeming mercy has merely added new sanctions to the word "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." It has called a family into existence, separate and distinct from an apostate world; a family bound together by other ties than those of flesh, and acknowledging new and peculiar obligations. The command to love our neighbour respects us as men in our common relation to Adam; this new command respects us as Christ's people in our common relation to Him. We are commanded to love each other, because he has loved us all, and we all belong to him. For this reason the Hebrews were to remember their brethren in bonds, and to feel as if bound with them; Christ had bound himself with their bonds, that he might lead captivity captive, and set them for ever free. For this reason they were to wash their brethren's feet; Christ had set before them this bright example of condescending and tender love.³ For this reason they and all the early Christians were commanded to be ready, if required, to lay down their lives for their brethren; "hereby perceive we the love of God," says St. John, "he laid down his life for us."⁴

From the greater however St. Paul descends to the less. Having spoken of love in its highest and noblest exercise, as subsisting between the members of Christ, he goes on to

¹ Acts xii. 3—11.

² John xiii. 34, 35.

³ John xiii. 1—15.

⁴ 1 John iii. 16.

speak of that humane and tender consideration which his people for the same Saviour's sake, owe to mankind in general;—

And them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

“Bonds” which are mentioned in the former clause have peculiar reference to Christ's people afflicted for his sake, and all who believed on the Saviour were to make the sufferer's case their own. “Adversity” on the other hand, might happen to heathen, Jew, or Christian; and those who knew the Saviour's grace, as inheriting nevertheless in common with all, a body subject to disease and pain, were to have compassionate remembrance of any who were subject to it. Be it thus with you, the Apostle would now say to the Hebrews; let not the new commandment and your relation to each other in Christ, make you forget the old commandment and your relation to all in Adam; to your “brotherly-kindness” see that ye add “charity.”¹ These two are not inconsistent; Jesus was an example of both. We find him, as has been already stated, loving his people with an affection altogether peculiar, treating them as friends and brethren, yea washing their feet in the depth of his unutterable condescension. But so far was this peculiar affection from shutting his heart against mankind, that it was in the same Jesus “that the...PHILANTHROPY of God appeared.”² He took this frail and mortal nature that he might be touched with a feeling of human infirmities; and wherever he heard of suffering, his unwearied feet were on their way to the sufferer's dwelling. This merciful kindness to man was clogged with no conditions. When the blind men asked their sight, when the father said, “Sir, come down ere my child die,” when the affectionate master told him, “My servant lieth at home sick of the palsy, grievously tormented,”³ Jesus did not inquire of the petitioners, if they

¹ II Peter i. 7.

² Titus iii. 4. original text.

³ Matthew xx. 30—34.; viii. 5, 6.; John iv. 49.

were willing to be his people, and recognized him as the Messiah promised to the fathers. He sought only to be certified of the presence of suffering, sorrow, and death; his immediate answer to one of these petitioners, "I will come and heal him," was the spirit of his answer to all who ever sought his gracious aid. The same character of undistinguishing philanthropy attached itself to his death also; "the man Christ Jesus gave himself a ransom for all."¹ And if we have seen the glory which shines in his life and death, it will change us into the same image, and make us philanthropists indeed. We shall remember that the children of Adam are one family, and we shall never ask the impious question, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Is any man in affliction or adversity? We shall remember that we inherit the same frail and mortal body, and that what he suffers waits only the command of God to visit us also; and we shall make that adversity and affliction our own. We shall learn in short, in the spirit of the exhortation of the text, to be foremost in devising comfort for the afflicted body, and ease and quiet for the troubled mind.

These remarks will apply also to the precepts which we have already considered. Though Christian strangers had an especial claim on Christian hospitality, the Apostle would not have forbidden the Hebrews to have given welcome and entertainment to an unbelieving Jew or heathen, if on the ground of a common humanity, he had implored shelter and relief. And though those who were in bonds for Christ's sake, had the first claim on their remembrance, he would not have forbidden them to shed the tear of humane pity, or to lift the prayer of Christian love, when they heard of any being unjustly imprisoned or made to suffer in their persons through the oppressions of arbitrary power. These good offices were meet expressions for humanity exalted and purified by the love of Jesus, as well as for brotherly kindness; and so far therefore from forbidding, St. Paul enjoins them on the believing Jews at Rome.* I need not remark that the law of Christ is the same still. The spirit of Jesus

* 1 Timothy ii. 5. 6.

† Romans xii. 14, 17, 19—21.

will teach us now to weep over the captive in the dungeon, even though his own sins have been the occasion of his bonds and imprisonment. And the same Spirit will make us open-hearted, liberal, and hospitable to all. There is a misapprehension on this subject, which it is well to remove. The man who fills his house with guests, who, in the phrase of the world, sees much company, is called a hospitable man. But this is not the hospitality here intended by St. Paul. He is enjoining kindness to those who really stand in need of it, because, for a time at least, they have neither home nor provision of their own. This desolate condition is pourtrayed in the most striking and beautiful manner, in the exquisite language of the poet;—

“ And homeless, near a thousand homes, I stood,
And near a thousand tables, pined and wanted food.”

To invite any in this sad and friendless estate to the shelter of our roof and the provision of our table, is true hospitality: the Hebrews in their evil day, must have had many opportunities of doing so, and we alas, though persecution has ceased to create them, have many opportunities still. And the spirit which prompts this Christian virtue, is as Divine as itself. It is not the love of ostentation and display, “the pride of life;” the truly hospitable man is he who knows himself to be a steward of the Giver of all good, and desires therefore, as they stand in need, to make others partakers of what has been bestowed on him. “Use hospitality,” says St. Peter, “without grudging. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same....as good stewards of the manifold liberality of God.”² It is manifold indeed, he opens his hand and satisfies the desire of every living thing. The young ravens cry to him, and the beasts of the forest, for their food; the wants of the vast human family lie on him every hour. And he who knows himself to be a steward of this liberal Lord, and is imbued with the philanthropy of the blessed cross, will “use hospitality without

² 1 Peter iv. 9, 10. “Grace” in the latter verse, has evidently the sense of liberality.

grudging," desirous to communicate of his Lord's benefactions in the spirit of the generous Giver.

It is thus that Christianity is the foundation of morals. For it is the knowledge and love of Jesus, in whose life and death both the new commandment and moral code stand embodied and fulfilled. And this knowledge and love transform us into his image, inspiring us at once with his complacent affection to his people, and with his humane compassion for all. The words of the poet are thus literally true.

"Talk they of morals?—oh thou bleeding Love
The true morality is love of Thee."

Morality, in truth, is the love of the cross acted out. Were men imbued with this blessed principle, where is the child who would rise up against his parent? Whence would come foul adultery and fouler murder? Who would put his hand to his neighbour's goods, or seek to spoil him of his reputation, or envy him the possession of those things which Heaven had bestowed? Love would banish from the earth these evil and unnatural doings, for "love worketh no ill to his neighbour," and "therefore love is the fulfilling of the law."¹

St. Paul is not satisfied however with laying down the principle of obedience: he dwells particularly on the seventh and tenth commandments; and these, as we shall see, ensure the fulfilment of the others. We proceed;—

LET MARRIAGE BE (*esteemed*) *honourable among all, and*
LET THE BED BE *undefiled*; FOR *whoremongers and adulterers*
God will judge.

This rendering is in conformity with the rest of the passage, the whole strain of which is hortatory: the conjunction *but* has also manifestly the force of *for*, since it introduces the sanction of the immediately-preceding exhortation. Marriage is an ordinance of Almighty God, by which he separates one man to one woman that they may

¹ Romans xiii. 8—10.

rear a godly seed. "He which made them at the beginning," says our Lord Jesus referring to our first parents, "made them a male and a female."¹ "Did not he make one," asks the prophet Malachi, "and wherefore one? That he might seek a godly seed."² Let this holy ordinance, says the Apostle, be held in honour in the midst of you. He might well say so, for God has most signally honoured it. He himself, as her nearest of kin, gave away the first bride; He himself united the first wedded pair; He himself pronounced the first nuptial benediction. For he "made a woman, and brought her unto the man;" the man received her from his hand, exclaiming "this is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh;" and "God blessed them, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."³ It is a goodly order then that this holy ordinance should be solemnized in God's house and by God's ministers, in his name. I know that this doctrine is not palatable to the taste of the present times; marriage is a civil contract, men say, and religion has no concern with it. It is not a civil contract; Almighty God is the Lord of the person both of man and woman, and at once creates and hallows their nuptial relation by his most holy act. And those who shall presume to set his authority aside, and to enter on this relation as if they were severally master and mistress of their own persons, are guilty, in his sight, of little less than legalized fornication. I utter this sentiment, fearless of the charge of bigotry, having my Lord's word to fall back upon. Christ expressly declares of married persons that "God hath joined" them "together."⁴ They are joined together in the name and by the authority of God; the act in Eden was not more truly his.

But alas for the Church of Christ, Satan has been in all ages, grinding her between two mill-stones. Whilst the spirit of infidelity, as we have seen, denies God's authority and sanction in holy matrimony, Popery on the other hand, has affixed to it the brand of impurity. Let it be held in

¹ Matthew xix. 4. original. ² Malachi ii. 15. ³ Genesis ii. 22, 23; i. 28.

⁴ Matthew xix. 6.

honour "among all," says the Apostle. And wherefore "among all?" The writer was thinking peradventure of that apostacy, the rise of which he was at this very time predicting to Timothy,¹ which should forbid to marry. He has left in these words a testimony against its wickedness, but the testimony has been in vain. The Church of Rome in defiance of them, forbids marriage to her priests; it sullies their purity, she declares, and interferes with their entire consecration to the service of the flocks committed to them. It sullies their purity indeed! It interferes with their devotion to Christ's flock! Well saith the Holy Ghost in the last-cited scripture, "speaking lies in hypocrisy." It interferes with their blind consecration, as men severed from all human and social ties, to the service of a spiritual Autocrat. To say that the married pastor is therefore unfitted for the duties of his holy calling, is to charge God's own wisdom with folly. For it contradicts the principle on which he has acted in incarnation, viz. that he whose blessed office it is to relieve and comfort others, should pass through their circumstances, and personally prove their sorrows. What can that pastor know, I ask, of many of the sorrows of his flock, who knows not a husband's heart, and cannot stand, save to his own shame, in the otherwise blessed relation of a father? Let us follow and observe him in his ministrations. He leaves his lone dwelling to visit the abode of sickness or of death, to find the bereaved husband weeping over the ashes of his wife, or the fond mother agonizing beside the couch of her dying child. But he looks on a sorrow with which experience has never taught him to sympathize. The afflicted one moreover is deprived of the consolation of remembering, he who now speaks to me was once in my circumstances, or is liable at least, at any time to be overtaken by them; he can form therefore some conception of the anguish which is now rending my broken heart. This preposterous enactment is thus as contrary to the principles of human nature as to the

¹ 1 Timothy iv. 1—5. The epistle to the Hebrews and the first epistle to Timothy were written within a year of each other.

canons of the Church of God. And these two, let it be observed, are ever in accordance with each other. In that very epistle in which St. Paul warns Timothy of the rise of the apostacy which should forbid to marry, this is shewn in a most striking way. For he sets the mind and will of God in opposition to its traditional enactment, charging his delegate to appoint over the flock at Ephesus, bishops and deacons bound with family ties; let them be husbands of wives, he says, let them be fathers of children. Nor is this all; he proves as he does so, from the nature of man, from the state of the Church and of society, the reasonableness of what is enjoined. He does not lay down indeed any stringent or absolute rule, compelling ministers to marry. But he gives us distinctly to understand it as the mind of God that the celibacy of the minister is his hindrance and disadvantage. And his directions to Titus in Crete, confirm his words to Timothy.¹

Having set forth the honourableness of the marriage-relation, the Apostle next proceeds to declare the inviolable character of its holy vows, "and let the bed be undefiled." He also adds immediately, "for whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." The Hebrews were living among heathens, who esteemed adultery a very venial trespass, and freely practised concubinage; there was therefore a reason for these words of solemn warning. If we look into them however more narrowly, we shall discover a mere catholic application; they contain the sanction of the whole exhortation which has preceded. We are taught by the Apostle elsewhere that marriage is a preventive to uncleanness.* Let marriage be therefore held in honour, he says, for God will judge whoremongers; let married persons be mutually faithful, for God will judge adulterers. And here it is impossible not to remark, that as sound Christian doctrine is the foundation of morals, so perverted Christianity opens the floodgates of immorality and sin. That apostacy of which we have already spoken, as if she meant to give the lie to God, has made void by her traditions,

¹ I Timothy iii. Titus i. 5-7.

² I Corinthians vii. 2.

both these words of St. Paul. Let marriage be honourable among all, is the sentence of the blessed Spirit. It is in certain cases most deeply dishonourable, is the answer of the Church of Rome. Let it thus be held in honour, adds the word of God, and let its vows be kept, for whoremongers and adulterers shall surely not escape. Whoredom and adultery are very venial things, is again the answer of the Romish apostacy; any priest may have them connived at and tolerated, but he may not have permission to marry. Satan indeed appears in all this, in his true colours, "defaming as impure what God calls pure," and palliating and excusing what God has pronounced detestable. But the indulgences of the Vatican shall avail little against the terrible sentence of God; nor shall the plea of the sensualist for his darling lust possess more efficacy to save him. Has God reason to be thus severe? Let us look at the fruits of these fleshly sins, and then we shall be able to answer. Let us look at the many once-happy hearths and homes which foul seduction has laid desolate; at the many weeping parents which it has sent grief-stricken into the grave; at the many confiding female hearts which it has ruthlessly broken; at the children to whom the brand of infamy is attached from their very birth, who grow up wild and unnurtured, without a father's counsel, without a mother's prayers, shunned even by their natural kindred, and given over, so to speak, to Satan. These are the fruits of whoredom, the direful consequences of adultery. Let man therefore plead for his unholy lusts as he may, hell-fire shall be their recompense. "Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments!"

Let us turn away however from this painful contemplation to the pleasing opposite, let us contemplate a Christian household ordered in the fear of God. The sacred names of parent and child, husband and wife, brother and sister, are known within its hallowed precincts, and the associations which they awaken, diffuse peace and happiness around. The parents are found training in the way of righteousness that holy seed which, when they shall have been gathered to their dust, shall arise and call the Lord blessed; the children

are found repaying this paternal care and tenderness with dutiful obedience and filial love. There is not in all the earth a spectacle more pleasing in the eyes of God; he pronounces on such a family his blessing out of Zion. The seventh commandment duly kept and honoured, almost ensures, in this way, the fulfilment of the fifth. For where the tie between husband and wife is preserved in all its sacredness, and those thus joined together by God, seek to fulfil his design in their union by training a holy seed to serve him, the tie between parent and child can hardly be rent asunder. But the breach of the fifth commandment is on the other hand, the almost certain consequence, when the seventh has been despised and broken. Unless we observe the marriage-vow in its inviolable sanctity, it is morally impossible to train a family to serve the Lord; ~~and~~ *there* is therefore no guarantee that our sons and daughters shall honour their father and mother.

The Apostle proceeds next to the tenth commandment;—

Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, the Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

We have in these words, covetousness forbidden. A contented mind is then recommended, as at once its opposite and its antidote. And finally, a reason is assigned why God's people should be thus contented,—he has promised that they shall never be forsaken. All this was peculiarly suitable to the circumstances in which the Hebrews were placed. The rude spoiler's hand had stripped them of many worldly comforts, leaving but little behind; they knew not moreover how soon that little might be swept away. Yield not, says St. Paul, to the temptation of the covetous eye. Look not on the comforts of those around you, who have enriched themselves perhaps at your expense, but be contented with the portion which is still left to you in the

providence of God. And be not anxious about the future : be not terrified though your adversaries threaten you with spoliation and destitution ; God says to you, as he did to Joshua, to Solomon, and to Israel, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."¹ Say therefore with boldness, "The Lord is my helper ;" you shall never be ashamed of the confidence which you thus repose in him. By the exercise of this confidence, let me remark, the people of God in all ages, when placed in the circumstances of the Hebrews, have been preserved in peace. "We have left you to want," was the cruel exclamation of a band of soldiers who in the evil days of persecution in this land, had stripped the house of a poor widow of every thing which it contained. "I shall never want while there is a God in the firmament," was the bold and confident reply of the impoverished tenant. And we may be assured from the language of the text, that God would justify this confidence. The windows of heaven shall be opened, the ravens shall again bring bread and flesh, the handful of meal shall again be miraculously multiplied, before any who trust in him shall be left desolate and put to shame.

This exhortation applies to us also. Let us not be anxious about amassing wealth, but be content with the portion which God has allotted, and the place which he has assigned to us in society. And let us not be afraid that our temporal provision shall fail. Our blessed Lord has told us to seek first the kingdom of God, and has assured us that if we do so, all other things shall be added.² Amid the many vicissitudes of this changing world, this promise remains sure from generation to generation ; and we may therefore, in the most adverse circumstances, dismiss all fear of anything which can befall us, humbly yet confidently trusting in his faithful word.

I have only to remark, in conclusion, the blessed results which would follow, if this tenth commandment were observed. It would ensure the fulfilment of the eighth ; if

¹ Joshua i. 5. I Chronicles xxviii. 20. Deuteronomy xxxi. 6. 8.

² Matthew vi. 33.

contentment reigned in every breast, theft would be banished from the world. It would go far to prevent the breach of the sixth ; who alas, can number the quarrels and murderous contentions of which covetousness has been the fatal source ? It would also do much to cause the ninth to be observed ; if every one was contented with his position and circumstances, the chief motive of slander would cease to exist. St. Paul has therefore particularized those two commandments of the second table which have the most direct connection with the others. And we have thus presented to us in the text, the complete moral portraiture of the Christian. See him among those who love the Lord ; his whole behaviour proclaims his brotherly love. See him among mankind in general ; he is full of humanity and compassion. Follow him into the bosom of his family ; it is the abode of purity, contentment, and peace. These are the blessed fruits of genuine Christianity, of Jesus known and loved. May they be found in our lives, that God may be glorified in us, and that we may be blessed in him !

See Appendix, Note V.

LECTURE XXIX.

Hebrews xiii. 7—10.

“Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.”

THE Hebrews have just been exhorted to confidence in God. They have been reminded of the Lord's promise never to leave nor forsake his people; they have been encouraged, on the ground of that promise, to say boldly in the most adverse circumstances, The Lord is our helper, we will not fear. And now, to confirm his words, St. Paul bids them call to mind the example of those who had been their spiritual guides and pastors, and to follow their faith. Consider “the end of their conversation,” he says: their ministry and devoted labours among you, were brought to a close, in the case of some of them, by bonds or exile; in that of others, by the martyr's death and crown. You were yourselves witnesses to the presence of the Lord with them in these trials; and that Lord will be as faithful to you, for he is “the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.” Only take heed, that you do not prove unfaithful to him, that you are not “carried about with divers and strange doctrines,”

turning back again to the law of Moses, with its meats and ceremonial observances. For these things are profitless, neither edifying the spirit nor producing any fruit of righteousness and truth. Yea, they are positively pernicious; for he who seeks justification by them, cannot be benefited by Christ. We who believe on Jesus, expect salvation through his sacrifice; but the disciple of Moses can by no means partake with us in this blessing.

Such is the substance of these verses. We shall consider them first, in their peculiar, and second, in their catholic application.

I. Remember them WHICH HAVE HAD the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

We are apt, on the first reading of this exhortation, to confound it with one which almost immediately follows, "Obey them which have the rule over you." But the meaning of St. Paul in the two places is totally different. In the exhortation just quoted, he tells the Hebrews to submit in the spirit of obedience, to those who were then their pastors; whereas, in the words of the text, he bids them remember for their encouragement, the example of those who had once stood to them in this sacred relation, but whose labours had been terminated by exile, bonds, or death. I have sought to mark this by inserting the word *had*; it agrees with the words, "who have spoken," and with what is said of "the end" or termination of the labours of these sainted men. They had been the rulers or guides of the Hebrew Church, speaking to its members the word of God. They had believed that word themselves; for the Hebrews are bidden to follow their faith. They had proved that faith to be genuine by a corresponding conversation, and by its glorious end; for the Hebrews are exhorted to have both in remembrance, that they might be encouraged to believe in God as these their first pastors had done. Examples are not wanting of the truth and justice of this apostolic

reference. St. Stephen was one of the ministers of the early Hebrew Church. The word of God was, in his mouth, accompanied by demonstration of the Spirit; for even his enemies "were not able to resist the wisdom...by which he spake." The Hebrews might well be exhorted to follow the faith of such a man, for Scripture has borne testimony that he was "full of faith and power." And the end of his conversation among them attested that faith as genuine. He was the fearless witness of the Lord Jesus in presence of the high-priest and his council, and his last words, as he sank under the murderous stones, contained a confession of his name. St. James the apostle was another minister of the early Hebrew Church; and his "conversation" had an "end" as glorious as St. Stephen's, for he also sealed his witness with his blood. Others of their early teachers were exiled; the persecution which arose after St. Stephen's death, scattered the whole Church of Jerusalem, except the apostles only, "through the regions of Judea and Samaria." And among those thus scattered, there must of necessity, have been many ministers. We read accordingly that though driven from their posts at Jerusalem, and compelled to relinquish their labours among their brethren, they resumed these labours in other places, as the providence of God gave opportunity. For they "went everywhere," yea "travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch," preaching the word of life. That very Apostle, whose words we are now considering, took an active part, as unbelieving Saul, in the severities of that early persecution. He beat and imprisoned every disciple of Jesus whom he could find in Jerusalem, and was so "exceedingly mad" against the exiles, that he "persecuted them even unto strange cities." Nor was this all; he kept the raiment of St. Stephen's murderers, yea looked on with satisfaction to see that martyr die. We may judge then with what feelings he must have written the words before us! For he had been himself a witness of the things to which these words refer; he had seen "the end of the conversation" of these early confessors; his hands had bound some of them, his malice had driven others into

exile, and under his violence the most eminent of them had died. But that faithful confession of Jesus which then stimulated his cruelty, is now recorded by him with devoutest thankfulness; he also bids the Hebrews look back upon it, for their daily encouragement and strength.¹

It was indeed a ground of encouragement, for he adds immediately,—

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever.

I have inserted the word *is* to express the evident meaning of the Apostle. Remember the end of the conversation of your early pastors, he says, and take encouragement from it; the Saviour in whom they trusted, is the same to-day that he was yesterday. He rose from his seat at the right hand of God to watch over Stephen in his hour of trial, and poured into his heart such fulness of consolation that even his enemies observed that his face was as the face of an angel. And the last words of that martyr declared that the Master had been with his servant in his last conflict, and that the servant knew that he should be with him whenever that conflict was decided.² Nor did he leave those comfortless or desolate who were exiled for his name; their willing testimony for that name, when driven for his sake from their homes and kindred, declared their unabated zeal and love. Such, the Apostle would say, the Lord was “yesterday,” and such he is “to-day.” If he calls you to submit to imprisonment or exile, his presence shall be with you in your prison, shall attend you in your exile. If he calls you even to shed your blood in testimony for his truth, you shall find strength to obey his will; He shall stand on your behalf also, on the right hand of God, and fill your hearts with heavenly consolation. And do not look anxiously forward to the future; do not say, We have been able to endure hitherto, but a darker day is coming, and our strength

¹ Acts vi. vii. viii. 1—4; ix. 1, 2; xxii. 3—5; xxvi. 9—11; xii. 1, 2.

² Acts vii. 59.

shall surely fail. For the faithfulness of the Saviour is unchangeable; He is "for ever" what Stephen found him in his extremity, and what you, if placed in that martyr's circumstances, shall find him now. As your day is therefore, your strength shall always be; no harm can possibly come to you, while trusting in his blessed name.

The Hebrews were in much greater danger from the seducing tongue of the false teacher than from the sword of the persecutor. St. Paul therefore proceeds,—

Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them which have been occupied therein.

The doctrines to which he here refers, were those of certain Judaizing teachers, who, as we learn from other scriptures troubled the churches of the Circumcision. They acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah, and bade their brethren trust in his perfect sacrifice. But they also taught that to do so, was not sufficient; that they must observe the law of Moses, with its meats and drinks, its distinction of clean animals and unclean, its various rites, purifications, and ceremonies. St. Paul characterizes these doctrines as "divers," i. e. different from those taught by the apostles of Christ; he also call them "strange," i. e. foreign to the spirit of the gospel. Nor was this his own sentence merely; his brethren the apostles, convened in solemn assembly at Jerusalem with the elders and the whole Church, had pronounced the same definitive decree.¹ "Be not" therefore "carried about" by them, he says, "for it is a good thing that the heart be established." These words seem in studied opposition. The first presents to us a ship at sea, tossed up and down by the restless elements, as St. Paul says elsewhere, "carried about with every wind of doctrine:"² the second gives the idea of a building, resting fixed and immoveable on the solid land. It is "grace and

¹ Acts xv.

² Ephesians iv. 14.

not meats," St. Paul continues, which alone can thus establish the heart. As long as you are trusting partly to Christ and partly to Moses, you will never have any abiding peace. But if ye are led to rest simply and exclusively on "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," looking to his sacrifice as your pardon, to his obedience as your acceptance, and to his promises as your only ground of hope, you will be kept in perfect peace, a peace which nothing can disturb. A heart thus established, the Apostle would go on to say, will find something infinitely more worthy of its attention than meats and drinks and Mosaic ordinances. They were of importance indeed whilst it was still the day of shadows; but they have not profited, yea they cannot profit, since Christ the substance has appeared. The experience of those who have "occupied" themselves in such studies, proves, says the Apostle, the truth of my words. For they have not attained in consequence, to greater love to God, to their brethren or to mankind; nor have they been enabled to bring forth in greater abundance, any of the fruits of righteousness. And you, he concludes, will find them as profitless; they will not recommend you to God's favour, they will not enable you to glorify His name.

We meet with the same apostolic argument, I would remark, in the epistle to Titus. St. Paul charges his delegate at Crete to inculcate on his flock the practice of every thing which was honourable, lovely, and of good report, to teach them to be patterns of righteousness both in their persons and in their families, to "put them in mind" to be good subjects to governors, and good citizens also in the best sense of that word. He then reminds him of that blessed gospel which has brought salvation, and commands him to declare its saving truths continually, that these fruits of righteousness might not cease to appear among his people. But "avoid" the law of Moses, he says, with the "strivings" and "contentions" to which it gives birth; for while the truths of the gospel "are good and profitable," such disquisitions "are unprofitable and vain."³ But we

¹ Acts xv. 11.

² Titus ii. 11-9.

must not learn, either from this language or from the text, to despise the law of Moses ; it served the purpose for which it was ordained of God. What the moon and stars are in the absence of the sun, such were the rites and institutions of the Hebrew lawgiver, till Christ the Sun of righteousness appeared. But now, since he has appeared, they are hidden in his greater light. The scene on Mount Tabor was a most beautiful shewing forth of this truth. Moses the representative of the law, and Elias of the prophets, were seen talking with Jesus. A voice came from the bright cloud, "This is my beloved Son, hear Him;" the disciples looked up, Moses and Elias were gone, and Jesus only remained. THE LAW, AND THE PROPHETS ITS MINISTERS, HAD GIVEN PLACE TO THE DISPENSATION OF THE SON.¹

The Apostle however has not yet done with his subject. These Jewish observances, he continues, are more than profitless ; if rested on for justification, they are positively pernicious.

We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat, which serve the tabernacle.

These words contain an allusion to a Mosaic ordinance, and can be intelligible to those only who are acquainted with its import. The priests who served the tabernacle, ate of the sacrifices by Divine command, in token of their participation in the benefits which these sacrifices procured. There was however one great sacrifice which was offered annually for all the congregation;² and of it the priests might not eat, it was burnt without the camp.³ The succeeding context makes it evident that it is to this sacrifice the Apostle is here referring; and when we bear in mind that it was the especial type of Christ, we can hardly fail to discern the striking and beautiful character of his reference. We Christians, he says, "have an altar," i.e. a sacrifice to eat of; and feeding on it by faith, we are partakers in its

¹ Matthew xvii. 1—3. See Blunt's Lectures on St. Peter's History, p. 89.

² Leviticus xvi.

³ Leviticus xvi. 27. vi. 30.

benefits. But as those who served the tabernacle of old, had "no right to eat" of the type of this sacrifice, so those who serve it now, may by no means eat of the antitype. In other words, my brethren, he would say, if you persist in seeking justification by Moses, you have, yea you can have, no part in Christ. Thus earnestly, as in all his epistles, does St. Paul warn the faithful against the admixture of Judaism with Christianity. Such an union, as he tells us everywhere, was destructive of the doctrine of salvation, and defeated the whole purpose of God.

II. Let us now consider the application of the text to ourselves. It teaches in the most solemn manner, the Christian pastor's place and responsibility; it also shews the character which should belong to, and distinguish him. Amid all your troubles and extremities, O ye Hebrews, says St. Paul, amid all your discouragements and temptations, still call to mind the heavenly course of those who once lived and laboured among you; and let the remembrance of their devotedness to God in life and death, lift up your hearts again and inspire you with fresh resolution. Oh what a testimony is this! The memories of these men of God were fragrant in the places where they once had been; the recollection of their sainted lives, of the things which they had done, and of the sufferings which they had endured, was an antidote against apostacy, and an encouragement to those who came after them, to cleave to the Lord and serve him. Scripture testifies, and truly not in vain, that "the memory of the just is blessed."¹ I need not say that this ought to be the case still. A Christian pastor may go from one field of labour to another, and visit many places before his earthly pilgrimage is ended. But he should leave his foot-prints as he goes; wherever he has sojourned, wherever he has laboured, a hallowed remembrance should survive him; men should say, a servant of Christ was here. For let us observe the place which the words of the text assign to him. He is to be the instructor of the flock indeed, for "the word of God" is in his mouth; but he is

¹ Proverbs x. 7.

to be their example also, for they are exhorted to "remember" him, and commanded to "follow his faith." They have a right to say, Shew to us in your own life and conversation, the fruit of that word which we daily hear from your mouth. It is the responsibility of every pastor to be able to answer such a challenge; woe unto him if he cannot do so! But duties and responsibilities are always reciprocal. If the text warns the pastor, it warns the flock also; if it tells him that he must lead in the way of righteousness, it tells them that they must follow. The true-hearted servant of Christ who is in some measure alive to his own responsibilities, and in the retirement of his closet, thinks with grief of heart on his own miserable shortcomings, has, alas, another cause of sorrow. He cannot help remembering that he has often pointed out, and in some measure led in the way of life, but that many of those committed to his guidance, have refused to follow him; that he has often warned them against the way of destruction, but that many, notwithstanding his warnings, are still perversely walking in it. This grief overwhelmed Moses; "Oh, this people" he exclaimed in anguish, "have sinned a great sin."¹ It bore down the spirit of the holy Psalmist, the anointed shepherd of Israel; "Rivers of waters run down mine eyes," he said, "because they keep not thy law."² It oppressed the loving Apostle who wrote the words before us, with "great heaviness and continual sorrow" of "heart;" "I could wish," he tells us, "that myself were accursed from Christ."³ He who knows it not, is a hireling without a shepherd's heart. Let every member of a Christian congregation, ask himself in the sight of God, Can any thing in me be the cause of it? Let every pastor ask himself, Can the carelessness and unbelief of any of those committed to me, be traced to my indifference to their welfare, or to my unfaithfulness to Christ? Were we brought reciprocally to this temper of mind, we should exemplify reciprocally, in some measure at least, the exhortation of the text before us.

But where is the congregation, where is the pastor who

¹ Exodus xxxii. 31.

² Psalm cxix. 136.

³ Romans ix. 1—3.

can answer these questions without condemning themselves? Our unworthiness is indeed great, our failures and shortcomings are many, and our hearts must, to this extent, condemn us. But we are not left comfortless. Let us fall back on that Divine Saviour in whom there is neither unworthiness nor shortcoming, and make him the rock of our confidence. "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever," is not the refuge of the troubled only; he is the hope of the sinful also from one generation to another. His "blood cleanseth from all sin," and "He is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him."¹ And if we truly look to him for the pardon of our failures in the past, we shall receive more grace for the future, so that we shall increase in love and grow in devotedness to his service. That grace which was sufficient for St. Paul in his arduous labours, that strength which was made perfect in his weakness, can enable the pastor to follow St. Paul's steps.* That Spirit of Jesus which turned the Thessalonians from idol-worship "to serve the living and true God," which transformed the drunken, covetous, and adulterous Corinthians into a people filled with holiness and love, can produce the same blessed fruit in the Christian congregation now, and make it "the glory of Christ."² There is no lack in the "living stone" of Israel,⁴ either of pardoning mercy or of sanctifying grace.

Our danger is that of the Hebrews, that we be turned to other confidences than "Jesus Christ and him crucified." Let us not therefore put away the warning of the text against "divers and strange doctrines," as if it applied to them only; for its application is catholic. It is indeed true that the early Churches of the Circumcision were prone to revert to Judaism from their reverence for the Hebrew lawgiver, and that we are in no such danger. But it is equally true that the leading feature of the dispensation of Moses, is more congenial to human nature than the leading feature of Christianity; and we are in danger therefore of imbibing

¹ I John i. 7.; Hebrews vii. 25.

² II Corinthians xii. 9.

³ I Thess. i. 9.; II Corinthians viii. 23. ⁴ Genesis xlix. 24.; I Peter ii. 4.

the spirit of Judaism, although we reject it in the letter. The careful reader of Scripture will discern in the words before us, the leading characters of both dispensations. The "meats" to which St. Paul refers, as belonging to that of Moses, are conjoined by him elsewhere, with "gifts and sacrifices" which could not pacify the conscience, "drinks," and "divers washings, fleshly ordinances."¹ It was a dispensation of externals; EXTERNAL OBSERVANCES PROCURED ITS BENEFITS, AND AVERTED ITS THREATENED PENALTIES. Ceremonial uncleanness might be removed and death averted, by washing the body in water; ceremonial guilt might also be put away, and death again averted, by offering the prescribed sacrifice.* The consecration of the holy Nazarite depended on his abstaining from certain meats, drinking no wine, and suffering his hair to grow; if he forgot these injunctions, he was defiled and became as another man.² Now in all these cases, be it observed, the external observance was the only thing which Moses enjoined. The efficacy of external acts was therefore neither a "divers" nor a "strange" doctrine in the days of the first tabernacle; it was the doctrine of the lawgiver himself, and breathed the very spirit of his economy. But their efficacy was like themselves, a shadow. They averted wrath from the body, they obtained mercy in this world from the gracious God of Israel; but no ceremonial observance enjoined by Moses, reached in its effect into the world to come, or had any power over the decisions of the eternal judgment-seat. Christianity is the very opposite of all this. It provides salvation from eternal wrath, and points out the way of everlasting acceptance; it also reveals the Judge as the God of those who trust in him, and bids us look for his mercy unto eternal life. Its ordinances moreover are for the spirit, and purity of heart is the holiness after which it commands us to seek. The efficacy of external acts is therefore now both a divers and a strange doctrine. St. Paul testifies expressly that "in Jesus Christ," i. e. under the dispensation

¹ Vol. I. p. 461.² Leviticus xvi. 28.; vii. 20.; iv.³ Numbers vi. 1—8.; Judges xvi. 17—20.

of Christ, "neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision; but faith which worketh by love;" he testifies again that nothing avails, save only "a new creature." Nay, so entirely foreign is such a sentiment to the character of the Christian scheme, that he employs the whole authority of his apostleship to impress on the Galatians, that if they imbibed and acted on it, they cut themselves off from the Saviour.¹ And the declaration of the last verse of the text is in all respects the same. For Christianity is a dispensation of spiritual realities; AND NO EXTERNAL OBSERVANCE CAN THEREFORE PROCURE ITS BENEFITS, OR AVERT THE PENALTIES WHICH IT THREATENS AGAINST TRANSGRESSION.

I have said that the leading feature of the Mosaic dispensation is more agreeable to human nature than the leading feature of Christianity. The history of the Church is a melancholy confirmation of this statement. Notwithstanding apostolic warning, the Churches of God among the Gentiles began very soon to follow the example of those of the Circumcision. They did not indeed revert to the law of Moses, but they imbibed nevertheless the genuine spirit of Judaism. Baptism, at a very early period, began to be deferred till the moment before death, that the external act might wash away the sins of a life-time; and the same efficacy was ascribed to the other sacrament. The grand feature of the Hebrew dispensation was thus introduced, and other features followed. Churches were built after the form of Solomon's temple; Jewish rites became the model for Christian worship; the holy supper began to be considered as a sacrifice, and the ministers of Christ assumed by degrees the place of the Jewish priesthood, as mediators between God and men. This evil went on increasing, till Satan having prevailed to graft JUDAISM on Christianity, proceeded to take his final step, and grafted HEATHENISM likewise. And his masterpiece, the Romish apostacy, is now before our eyes. She is purely Jewish in her holy water, in her doctrine of sacramental efficacy, in the place which she assigns to her priests, and in her ever-repeated

¹ Galatians v. 2-6; vi. 15.

sacrifices. While in bringing these sacrifices into the presence of God, in bowing down to images and pictures, and in worshipping the creature (practices which Moses knew not of, or knew only to condemn,) she is purely and entirely Heathen. That bronze figure which in the days of Rome Pagan, was called Jupiter Capitolinus, is now called St. Peter; and the thunder which then graced the hand of the god, is exchanged for the keys! The name only has been altered; the idolatry remains the same. That apostacy is thus the perfect mixture of Jewish and Heathen rites, with just as much of the tinsel of Christianity as covers the intentional deceit.

The poet has beautifully said,

“———Woe awaits a country, when
She sees the tears of bearded men.”

And if woe had not been awaiting the Church of God, if danger from this quarter had not been at hand, apostles inspired of the Holy Ghost would not have written with such passionate energy. No man was ever possessed of more soundness of mind or of more sobriety of feeling than St. Paul; and yet he protests to the Galatians, “I would they were even cut off which trouble you.”¹ Nor did he speak thus without a cause. He saw them returning to circumcision, observing “days, and months, and times, and years;” grafting the institutions of Moses on the pure gospel of Christ.² He saw the working of that deadly leaven which the Spirit of prophecy told him should well nigh leaven the whole lump,³ he saw the enemy setting ajar that fatal door the opening of which was to let in upon the Church such a flood of apostacy, that she should well nigh be swept from the earth. And he only fulfilled his calling, when he warned her thus earnestly of the danger. Would to God that she had taken his warning! Ages of darkness and sorrow would not then have rolled over her; nor would she have caused to be blasphemed, through her superstitions

¹ Galatians v. 12. ² Galatians iv. 9—11. ³ II Thessalonians ii. 7.

and crimes, that holy and blessed name which she was called into existence to make known.

Let us treasure up this warning then, and have it before our minds continually. Let us beware that we are not found saying, We were baptized, we have kept all the ordinances of the Church, we have partaken regularly of the holy supper, and therefore all is well with us. Many, I greatly fear, are saying so at this time ; it is truly mournful to witness the anxiety expressed by dying persons for the holy Eucharist, whilst yet they express no repentance for sin, nor any wish to be instructed in the knowledge of the Saviour. This doctrine of the efficacy of external acts, is "divers" from that of Christ's apostles, and foreign to the whole spirit of Christianity. If we are carried away with it, we renounce our baptism and become disciples of Moses; and as "those who serve the tabernacle," we are cut off by the canon of the text, from the Christian altar. The ordinances and sacraments of the Christian dispensation are channels of the "grace" of God. Baptism is the seal of his Fatherly love, of the remission of sin and the gift of the Holy Ghost. The preached word is designed to keep us in remembrance of these unspeakable mercies of our God; the worship of the sanctuary is appointed that we may have communion with him as our Father through Jesus Christ; the holy table is spread that we may draw nigh in faith and love to him who has loved us and given himself for us. And if we make this use of these precious institutions, our hearts shall be "established" in peace with God; we shall be "profited" also in doing so, for we shall grow in brotherly love and in love to all men, and shall bring forth, both personally and in our families, the blessed fruits of righteousness. But if on the other hand we rest in the mere observance, these results shall not follow, and that observance shall avail us nothing. The holy Supper itself, that which is to faith the body and blood of Christ, the pledge of everlasting mercy becomes, when pressed carnally with the teeth, a piece of bread, powerless to save. The brazen serpent which Moses made by God's

command, was effectual to heal; every one who was bitten, found life as soon as his eyes rested on it. But when Israel burned incense to this precious relic, as if in itself it had possessed this power, Hezekiah destroyed it and called it "a piece of brass." The good king would not that his people should trust in it; for "he trusted IN THE LORD GOD OF ISRAEL."¹ And let us follow his example; let us trust neither in the bread nor in the water, but in our Divine Redeemer alone. He is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever;" they that trust in him shall not be put to shame. May his grace teach us to do so!

¹ II Kings xviii. 4, 5.

See appendix, Note W.

LECTURE XXX.

Hebrews xiii. 11—16.

"For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name. But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

It has just been pointed out by the Apostle, that he who depended on the law of Moses for salvation, could not possibly be a partaker of Christ. He has proved this moreover, in a manner which must have been peculiarly convincing to a Jew, viz. by reminding the Hebrews that the servants of the tabernacle were not permitted to eat of the sacrifice of the great day of atonement, the especial type of Messiah. For that sacrifice, he now goes on to remind them, instead of being eaten, was burnt without the camp. There is however another idea in the first verse of the text; it connects with those which follow, as well as with that which has preceded it. The reproach which adherence to Christ brought upon them, was now causing the Hebrews to waver. Remember therefore, says the Apostle, the sacrifice of the great day of atonement; it was carried without the camp and burned. And its antitype the blessed

Jesus, was in like manner, hurried forth of Jerusalem, and "suffered without the gate." He submitted however to this degradation that he might separate us to himself from a world lying in wickedness, a world which hates us because we cleave to him. Let us therefore expect reproach, yea let us welcome it, because it is for his sake. And instead of repining because man denies to us an abiding city here, let us set our hearts on the Saviour's promise of the new Jerusalem, and offer "by him...continually...the sacrifice of praise to God." Let us also lay ourselves out "to do good and to communicate," giving to man on the one hand, no just cause for his hatred, and seeking to gain on the other, the approbation of our heavenly Father.

It is not necessary to point out the extreme beauty of these verses. We shall consider them, first, in their peculiar, and second, in their catholic application.

I. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

We do not need to dwell longer on the first idea contained in these words. The Hebrews were perfectly aware that no one who in any way served the tabernacle or was subject to the law of Moses, might eat of the great annual holocaust; and they were able therefore to draw the conclusion which the Apostle has been so earnestly pressing on them. But the other idea which is suggested by this reference, is of the utmost importance, and demands our most earnest attention. You know, my brethren, St. Paul would say, that the bodies of these sin-offerings were esteemed so thoroughly unclean, that they were "burned without the camp." Nay more; the man who burned them was defiled by their touch, and was commanded to "wash his clothes, and bathe his flesh in water," before he could "come into the camp" again, and mingle with his brethren.¹ It was the same, he adds, with

¹ Leviticus xvi. 27, 28.

their blessed Antitype: our scribes, Pharisees, and rulers esteemed Jesus to be thoroughly unclean. They accounted him unworthy to live among them, for they cried "Away with him, crucify him;" they thought him unworthy even to die in the holy city, for they set up his cross "without the gate." But there was another hand than theirs in this fearful tragedy; all their malice could not have prevailed to kill him, if he had not gone willingly to death. This suffering without the gate was the act of Jesus himself; "No man taketh my life from me...I lay down my life," was his own solemn testimony.¹ Whilst therefore in his being hurried forth to die, we read the world's judgment of him; in his consenting to this indignity we read his judgment of the world. I leave this city, was the language of his act as he bore his cross without the gates of Jerusalem, in testimony that no righteousness can dwell in it: I depart out of this world, he said as he gave himself to be nailed to the tree, in testimony against it as in apostacy from its God and Creator. And my purpose in dying, is to separate to myself mine own which are in the world,² to gather a people who united now with me in bearing its reproach, may another day be counted worthy to dwell beside me in the kingdom of God. Such is the double aspect, says the Apostle, of the death of Christ, the double meaning of the cross which was erected without the gates of Jerusalem. You read in it the world's judgment of the Saviour; you read in it also at once his judgment of the world, and his unspeakable love to us.

And when you look at it in this double aspect, he continues, it should teach you not only to expect reproach from man, but to welcome it for Christ's sake.

Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

The language of the former of these verses is peculiarly strong. 'To be put forth from the camp of Israel was a

¹ John x. 17, 18.

² John xiii. 1.

sign of uncleanness. The leper whose very touch defiled, had this mark of degradation put upon him;¹ and the bodies of the annual sin-offerings as has been already mentioned, were, because of their uncleanness, treated in the same manner. But let us not wait, says the Apostle, till others put us forth; let us embrace contempt and scorn of our own accord; "let us go forth...without the camp." Jesus was crucified "without the gate;" and we "therefore" may expect no other treatment. He also despised the shame of that cross in the greatness of his love to our souls, dying to sanctify us with his own blood. Let us "therefore" despise the shame of going forth without the camp, as the objects of contempt and execration; it is "to him" who has loved us that we are going forth, it is "his reproach" that we are "bearing." Faith can discern him even now, lifted up on his cross without the gates of Jerusalem, pouring forth his life to separate us from a present evil world, and calling us to be separated, beckoning on us to come forth and join him. And let us obey that call, my brethren, leaving behind as worthless dross, every thing which the world can offer to detain us from our Lord, and "rejoicing that" we are "counted worthy to suffer shame for his name."² Are our goods and possessions spoiled, and does man deny to us an abiding city here? It cannot be otherwise with his people in a world which denied their Lord a home. Moreover we cannot have a "continuing city" in the world that now is, for Jesus died to save us out of it; and we ought not to desire to have it, for he has provided for us "one to come." The only thing worthy of our care is to be found meet to be its citizens; and we should covet the distinction of being one with Jesus in reproach now, that we may be one with him in glory hereafter. I need not point out the heart-stirring character of these Christian admonitions. And St. Paul was in his own person, a noble example of the exhortations which he thus addressed to others. He did indeed inherit the reproach of his Master; the madness of man's rage against both, found expression sometimes in the very

¹ Leviticus xlii. 45, 46.² Acts v. 41.

same words. "Away with him, away with him, crucify him," was the exclamation of the Jewish multitude against Jesus; "Away with such a fellow from the earth; it is not fit that he should live," was the kindred cry with which the same multitude interrupted the defence of his Apostle.¹ But nothing of all this, though many times repeated, had any effect on his dauntless spirit; he took pleasure "in reproaches for Christ's sake,"² and seeks in the words before us to inspire those to whom he wrote with the holy courage which animated his own breast.

The text proceeds,—

By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

We seek a city to come, he would say, even the new Jerusalem. Instead therefore of being dismayed by the rage of our enemies and by the opprobrium which they cast upon us, let us give thanks continually for this blessed hope. Let these thanksgivings ascend "by him" who is our Mediator, to his Father and our Father, the Fountain of mercy and blessing; let them be rendered also "to his name," for he has obtained it for us. He poured forth his precious blood to purge our sins, that we might be made meet for this holy inheritance; he has now gone to the right hand of the Father, to prepare that inheritance for us; he has promised to come again and receive us to himself. Our tongues then should declare his goodness; our lips should utter his praise. This is the sacrifice which is now required of us; by the one offering of himself he has made an end of the legal sacrifices, and abolished the law which enjoined them. And as those who in that offering have found the remission of sin, and through the mercy of their Saviour, have the hope of this everlasting inheritance, we may well be undismayed in the midst of the most overwhelming tribulation, setting against present sorrow the cheering hope of everlasting joy.

¹ John xix. 15.; Acts xxii. 22.

² II Corinthians xii. 10.

No writer however is more practical than St. Paul. He concludes,—

But to do good and to communicate forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

I have bid you give thanks, he would say, for the hope which is set before you; let me now remind you that you should live as those who are worthy of such a hope. You have the cheering anticipation of seeing God hereafter, and should therefore resemble him in character here. "Forget not," therefore, "to do good," not to each other only, but to your enemies: for "the Highest" sends his rain upon the evil, and "is kind to the unthankful." They have used you despitefully and persecuted you, they have stripped you of your possessions; but you must not on that account "forget to communicate" for the supply of their need, any thing which may yet remain to you. He who asks no longer the blood of bulls and goats "is well-pleased with such sacrifices;" they have a more grateful odour before him than Aaron's sweet-smelling incense.¹ And the reward of such behaviour shall be great: you shall be owned in the day of glory as his children, and his bosom shall be your resting-place for ever.²

II. Let us now direct our attention to the lessons of catholic truth which this precious Scripture teaches. We learn from it, first, the character of the heart of man; second, the character of the mercy of God; and third, the character of the true Christian.

1st. The real state of man's heart since the fall, has been in every age of the Church, and is still, a subject of much controversy. This controversy may at once be ended; let us look to that which is the great revelation of human nature, viz. THE CROSS OF CHRIST. When I say the cross, I include the reproach which led to it, as well as the act of crucifixion; these two when taken together, are the revelation of human nature. Let us just observe the language of the text. No words can express the abhorrence with which a

¹ Philip iv. 18.

² Matthew v. 43—48. Luke vi. 27—36.

Jew regarded the body of the animal which had borne the iniquities of the congregation. If he who was employed to burn it, had failed to wash his clothes and to bathe his flesh in water, his brethren would have avoided him, saying, You have touched that abominable thing. And yet this is the image which St. Paul uses in the text, to express the feeling with which our blessed Lord was regarded! The reproach of his people is called going without the camp, as those whose very touch was defilement; and such going forth is said to be "TO HIM," and is called "bearing HIS REPROACH." For the malefactor who "suffered without the gate," may well be considered as under the ban of humanity, and spoken of as "without the camp." And who is he who was thus abhorred? "The only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth," is the answer of St. John.¹ And what was the character of that life which earned such bitter hatred? He "went about doing good," says St. Peter, "and healing all that were oppressed of the devil;"² "whithersoever he entered," says St. Mark, confirming his brother's testimony, "into villages, or cities, or country...as many as touched him were made whole."³ But is it possible that man could find it in his heart to render such a recompense for benignity and grace like this? There are seasons when this question forces itself upon us. The minister of Christ finds himself many times in the house of sickness or of death. He sees the mother bending in mute agony over the dying child, the wife sitting inconsolable beside the dying husband, or the child weeping in distraction by the bed of the dying parent. He sees at other times, the dead laid out, and feels himself surrounded by the solemn stillness of the house of mourning. And oh, at such seasons, the remembrance of the blessed Saviour rushes irresistibly on the mind, and we can scarcely believe it possible that he could be reviled and rejected. For he was found continually in the midst of these scenes of woe. And he was not in the midst of them to express unavailing sympathy, as, alas, his servant is now constrained to be. He was there for the godlike purpose of

¹ John i. 14.² Acts x. 38.³ Mark vi. 56.

bidding disease depart, and commanding death to quit its prey; he entered the house of mourning, but before he left it, that mourning was turned into joy. This work of mercy was his vocation while he dwelt among men; he did not wait to be solicited by the afflicted, he "went about" in search of them. But alas, the same scripture which records this life of love and benignity, records also that man did find it in his heart to repay it with hatred, reproach and murder! And His was no ordinary reproach, nor was that ordinary hatred with which he was assailed. "He hath a devil, and is mad," they said, "why hear ye him?"¹ When the heathen governor washed his hands of his murder, "his blood be on us, and on our children," was the answer of "all the people."² And even after they had obtained their wish and saw him nailed to the accursed tree, they could not cease; their wanton insults aggravated his dying agonies. These things, as we read them, almost stagger faith. To what principle of human nature, we ask, can they for a moment be attributed? For man has a reason both for his feelings and for his acts; he neither loves nor hates without some assignable cause. One word of Jesus unravels the whole mystery. "The world cannot hate you," he said to his carnal relatives; "but me it hateth, because I testify of it, that the works thereof are evil."³ In these words lies the secret of the cross. Jesus went about doing good indeed, but he went about also reproving sin; yea that reproof was embodied in his holy and spotless behaviour. Nor was this reproof confined to the grosser forms of transgression; he detected and condemned the sins of the heart also. He showed to the covetous their worldly-mindedness; he exposed his sinister motives before the eye of the hypocrite himself; he convinced the self-righteous that the love of God was not in them; he constrained the formalist to feel in his heart that his external religion would never be a passport to heaven. Man ever will dislike such teaching, and in the case which is now before us, this dislike was aggravated, because the words of the teacher came home to the conscience with a demonstration which

¹ John x. 20.² Matthew xxvii. 25.³ John vii. 7.

could not be withstood. The displeasure which his doctrine thus excited, was necessarily extended to his person, and ripening in time into deadly hatred, was at last consummated in deeds of blood. His words of holy reproof stirred up the latent spark of enmity to God which lies smouldering in the human breast; and blazing forth with its native violence, it slew him. Oh what a revelation of the heart of man is here! It just amounts to this that no kindness which God can shew to his apostate creature, will for a moment compensate to him for interference with his sin. In the case which we are now considering, that kindness was exuberant and overflowing, and men themselves were astonished at it;¹ but he who was so gracious, also dared to reprove their iniquities, and the cross was the deadly result. The cry, "Away with this man," uttered against him by the infuriate Jewish multitude, has, when looked at in this light, a fearfully emphatic meaning. He has restored, it might have been said to them, from the jaws of death, yea from the grave itself, your nearest and dearest relatives, your parents, your wives, your children; he has delivered your own persons from blindness and lameness, from the palsy and the leprosy; he has set you free in mind and body, from demoniacal possession and Satanic power; and do you say, "Away with him?" Yes, we do say it, was the meaning of that cry. We will welcome these evils back again; we will submit to disease of body and distraction of mind, we will see our families descend into the darkness of the grave, and consent in our own persons to the cold embrace of death; all these things are better than to be disturbed in our iniquities. This man ceases not to disturb us; away with him therefore, and release unto us Barabbas; CRUCIFY HIM. Let us not put from us the humbling instruction of this awful scene by ascribing this wickedness to a generation of the Jews, famed for bigotry, superstition, and ignorance. It was man's act, and cannot be traced to any peculiar circumstances. Christ sent his apostles to the learned and polished Gentiles, and they preached the word of God's love through the mighty

¹ Mark vii. 37.

empire of Rome, attesting its truth by the same gracious wonders which their Master had wrought in Judea. And the result was the same. The ignorant and bigoted Jew had reviled and crucified the Master; the idolatrous Roman and philosophic Greek reproached and killed the servants. The ministry of Christ and his apostles was thus the trial of human nature on the most extended scale. The Jew had been blessed with the true religion, and civilization had done its utmost for the Greek. But the religious advantages of the one and the polite literature of the other were alike ineffectual to recover the heart from its apostacy; and when God drew nigh, that apostacy stood revealed. Such then is human nature; such is the character of every heart in which the Spirit of grace is not dwelling; it is only needful that God should draw nigh, to elicit its deadly enmity and fan the smouldering spark into a blaze. Let the pleading of His love be heard on earth again as it was heard in the days of Jesus; nothing more is needed to re-enact the scenes of Golgotha and Calvary.

2nd. If these things be true, we may well wonder at what follows, and yet we are partly prepared by them to understand it. For the character of God's mercy stands revealed in the text, at once in its unspeakable greatness and in its holy design. There is most blessed emphasis in the words, "His own blood." If we ask a king to do some favour for us, he refers us to his servants. But Christ did not send an angel to help us; He came himself: he did not appoint a delegate to suffer; the blood which was poured out, was his own. We have the same precious thought in other Scriptures. He "gave himself for us," says St. Paul; "his own self bare our sins in his own body," is the still more emphatic language of St. Peter.* And who are the objects of such a love as this? Man's love to his fellow is partly the result of ignorance; the truest affection which ever glowed in a human breast, would abate greatly in its intensity, if we could read each other's hearts. Of God only it can be said,

* Titus ii. 14.

* I Peter ii. 24.

"Thou who canst love us, though thou read us true."

Christ knows what is in man,¹ and, as we have seen already, has laid bare the human heart in his cross. And yet the world in this condition of discovered apostacy, was and is the object of the love of Calvary! St. Paul assisted at the murder of the martyr Stephen, and would gladly, had opportunity been afforded, have assisted also at the death of Jesus. And yet he tells us of "the Son of God,"—"who loved me, and gave himself for me!"² Truly we know not at which to wonder most, the depth of man's depravity, or the greatness of God's mercy. The mystery of the cross is, that it exhibits both to view. We read in it that man hated his Creator with a hatred strong as death; we read in it that even while he was doing so, his Creator was yearning over him with a love of equal intensity! God must have a design worthy of himself in the revelation of love like this. The design is declared in the text, "that he might sanctify the people," i. e. separate them to his holy service from the midst of an apostate world. The same thing is set forth in the scriptures which have just been cited. If Jesus "gave himself for us," it was that he might "purify to himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works;" if he "bare our sins in his own body," it was "that we being dead unto sins should live unto righteousness." And the people referred to in the text, are those who believe in his name. His blood is the instrument of this cleansing. It brings God's peace to the conscience, and reveals his love to the heart, so that we return with weeping and supplications, to the Father from whom we have wandered. The words of St. Peter are thus verified in the experience of every believer. His Saviour's wounds are his healing; for whereas he was a lost and wandering sheep, he is brought back by the blood which flowed from them, to the Shepherd and Bishop of souls.³ This view of the design of God's mercy agrees, let me remark, with the other things set forth in the text. If the world is indeed in the apostate condition which is here

¹ John ii. 24, 25.

² Galatians ii. 20.

³ I Peter ii. 24, 25. Wickliffe.

represented, and the people of God who are by nature of the world, are indeed citizens of the new Jerusalem, they must needs be sanctified and cleansed to be made meet for its eternal purities. Again, if the character which now distinguishes them is grateful love to God, and love to man for his sake, they must needs be separated in heart and mind from a world which hated and crucified the Son of God, the Redeemer and Friend of man. It also agrees, let me remark finally, with the types of the old law. Moses appointed no sacrifice instead of duty; he allowed no one to say, I have brought my sacrifice and may therefore be excused from obeying. The purpose of all his sacrifices was to cleanse the offerer, that he might be accepted in the service which he rendered. And the design of God in the sacrifice of Christ is the same. That sacrifice excuses no man from the obedience which he owes to God; it cleanses him who believes in it, and renders his obedience acceptable. By pacifying the conscience and shedding abroad God's love in the heart, it separates us to Jesus, and seals us as his own

3rd. The character which is assigned in the text to the true Christian, and which he is called upon to cultivate, is closely connected with what has just been set forth. Grateful love to God is the first part of it; let our mouths, says the Apostle, be filled with God's praise, and with the honour of Jesus all the day. For if we have believed in his name, we have found peace of conscience in his blood, even the assurance of God's love and of the everlasting remission of sin. We have also laid hold of his promise of eternal life and are seeking that city to come, in which we shall dwell with our Saviour for ever. And shall this faith and hope kindle no love in return? Shall we rejoice in this eternal mercy without any thankfulness to the gracious bestower of it all? Nay, God forbid; "the sacrifice of praise continually," is the believer's "reasonable service." Deadness to the present world, is the second part of the true Christian's character. Let us willingly surrender the good opinion of man, says St. Paul, let us cheerfully consent to be the

objects of his reproach and execration ; this world is not our home, "here have we no continuing city." The glories of the new Jerusalem, the eternal abode of the just, have shone into the believer's heart ; the sight has also turned into deformity the beauty of the world that now is, and made it cease to be an object of desire. Love to man for Christ's sake, and that open hearted beneficence which delights to do good and to communicate, is the third part of the character of God's people. God is well pleased with such behaviour and with the love which prompts it, and has enjoined them both on his children. "And his commandments are not grievous." He has remembered us, he has communicated for the supply of our need the best and greatest gift of everlasting love ; and surely then we ought to remember others, and to communicate to them for his sake. They may be our enemies, our revilers and slanderers ; but that ought not for a moment to stay the hand of our beneficence, for we had spoken many hard words against God and were enemies to him in our minds by wicked works, when he sent his Son to die for us. Faith in his love moreover and hope in his eternal mercy will teach us this blessed lesson ; we cannot remember the good which he has done to us, and at the same time practically forget his reasonable and gracious injunction. For his love believed transforms us into its image, so that we love others after his example. It also raises our affections to him, and teaches us to find our dearest joy in doing that which is right in his sight. It becomes therefore on the one hand, our pleasure to do good ; it is on the other, a sufficient impulse to acts of beneficence and open-handed kindness, that "with such sacrifices God is well-pleased."

It well becomes us to remember these precious lessons. On the vitally important subject to which they refer, they present us with very different views from those not unfrequently entertained. Many who have been signed with the sign of the Cross, and bear the Christian name, are yet built up in the idea that their hearts are very good, and that there never has been anything in their lives to deserve the wrath

of God. They would start back in astonishment if they were bidden repair to that Cross, and learn at the foot of it the humbling lesson that their hearts were by nature at enmity with God, and that their lives were in consequence impure before him. They would be equally amazed if they were told that the blood of that Cross must be applied to their hearts by faith, before either heart or life could bear the inspection of his eye. It is needless to say that where such spiritual blindness prevails, the features of true Christianity cannot possibly be discerned. The persons of whom I am speaking, may be conscious of a momentary glow of gratitude to the Giver of all good when some temporal benefit is bestowed on them; but they have never rendered thanks for the stupendous benefits of redemption, because they have never felt their need of them or realized their unspeakable value. Neither is it possible that they should be dead to a present world; the things which are seen are their realities, and invisible things are a mere shadow. They may be charitable and beneficent, but the love of God is not the motive of their charity; it springs from no higher source than the excitement of natural feeling. They have been stirred up "to communicate," but not by the cross; they have done what is outwardly good, but not from any desire to please him who has bought them by his blood. The spirit of adoption is totally wanting in their religion; and lacking "that excellent gift of charity" they are "counted dead" before the Lord. Let us then, I again say, treasure up the lessons of the text; they will preserve us from being deceived and destroyed by this nominal and spurious Christianity. If we learn from them what we are by nature and what we are made by grace, and prove experimentally the holy power of that "faith which worketh by love," we shall be taught to serve God now, and prepared for his presence hereafter. May God grant this grace to us!

LECTURE XXXI.

Hebrews xiii. 17—19.

"Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you. Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner."

In the body of this epistle, as we have already had abundant evidence, St. Paul has laid the truth of God respecting both doctrine and duty, fully before the Hebrews. And now, having confidence that their pastors taught the same things, he goes on to remind them of the duty of spiritual subjection to their word. They have no object, he adds, but your salvation; no desire, but that when giving in their final account of you, they may do it with joy and not with grief; and if they are not able to do so, it will be worse for you than for them. To prevent the Hebrews however from supposing that either he or the pastors of whom he spake, exalted themselves above them, he asks an interest in their prayers, adding with truly Christian humility, "For we trust that we have a good conscience, in all things willing" to act toward you and all men, with integrity, uprightness, and honour. And finally, to keep them in mind of Christ as the only Shepherd of the sheep, the only fountain of spiritual mercy and blessing, he tells them that if they desired to have again the benefit, which, it appears, they had enjoyed before, of his presence and personal instruction, prayer was the appointed means of obtaining it.

Such is the substance of these verses. But I know not how to do justice to their contents, for their value cannot be expressed in words. They contain principles which, if understood and acted out, would shew to God's people the middle path of safety, and warn them from the opposite paths of danger into which they are at present wandering. We learn from them in the first place, that it is according to the mind of Christ that there be spiritual rule and authority in his Church. We are instructed in the second place, in the duty and responsibility of the Christian pastor. We learn in the third place, the character which ought to distinguish him. We are reminded in the fourth place, of the bond which connects him with his people. And we are taught in the fifth place, that Christ is the true Pastor, the true Provider for the spiritual wants of His flock. Let us take up these points in order.

I. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves.

We are assured from these words that spiritual rule and authority in His Church is according to the mind of its exalted Head. This doctrine is objected to by two classes of persons and from very different motives. One class tell us, "There ought to be no ministry in the Church and no rule, for all Christians are brethren." While I venerate as I do, the piety which is often found in connection with this sentiment, truth constrains me to add that I cannot understand how these persons read their Bibles. The state of things for which they contend, had no existence in the Church while she was under especial Divine guardianship. In the Church of Jerusalem, soon after the day of Pentecost, we find apostles and deacons;¹ and when St. Paul visited that city nearly thirty years afterwards, the existence of a regular ministry distinct from the rest of the Church, appears on the very face of the narrative. "When we were come to Jerusalem," says St. Luke who accompanied him, "the

¹ Acts vi. 1—6.

brethren received us gladly. And the day following," he continues, "Paul went in with us unto James; and all the elders were present."¹ And by thus waiting first on him, the apostle of the Gentiles recognized his brother's authority, and that of the elders who ruled along with him. It was the same with the Church among the Gentiles. When the apostles Paul and Barnabas, in obedience to the word of the Holy Ghost, had preached the gospel and gathered many to the faith of Jesus, at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, they ordained pastors in each of these cities before they confided the faithful to the protection of the Lord.* It might be about fifteen years afterwards that St. Paul making haste to Jerusalem, tarried at Miletus, and sending to Ephesus, "called the elders of the Church. And when they were come to him," he charged them, "Take heed to ...all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to shepherd the Church of God."³ His epistle to the Philippians teaches the same doctrine, and makes that very distinction between ministers and private Christians to which we have referred already; for it is inscribed "to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons."⁴ St. Peter, writing about the same time to the Churches of the Circumcision scattered through all the countries of the East, lays down particularly the duties of the pastoral office, charging those to whom it was entrusted, at once by the sufferings of Christ and by the glory which he has promised to his servants, to take a faithful oversight of his flock.⁵ And the parting charge of St. John, written after all his brethren were deceased, when he himself also was about to be gathered to his rest, and when the apostleship in his person was just taking leave of the Church, teaches the same thing. For his epistles to the seven Churches recognize distinctly the existence of a standing ministry, a ministry headed up in the person of an angel or bishop, who is commended for all the good, and held responsible for all the evil which the apostle found

¹ Acts xxi. 17, 18.² Acts xiv. 23.³ Acts xx. 17, 18, 23. original.⁴ Philip i. 1.⁵ I Peter v. 1-4.

among his people.¹ Such was the state of the Church when the apostleship resigned her to the Lord; spiritual rule and authority was an essential ingredient in her constitution. And as rule on the one part implies obedience on the other, St. Paul exhorts the Hebrews in the text, to obey their pastors and submit themselves. Receive, he would say, from their mouths, the word of salvation, the word also of correction and reproof; and when they point out to you the way of life, pursue that way with joy. We will listen to a pastor, is the language of those persons to whom I have already referred, when he speaks the truth; but we expect to hear that truth just as readily from the lips of any other man. This is not godly language. If we open our ears to every one who chooses to speak to us, we may receive as much error as truth. But we ought to expect to hear truth from the pastor, because he is the ordinance of God for speaking it; and if we seek the Lord faithfully in our retirements, He will speak to us both in public and private by the ministry which he has thus ordained. Unless the justice of this sentiment be acknowledged, the exhortation before us is totally unintelligible. Shall we say with some then that it has now lost its meaning? that it applied only to those early times in which it was written, when pastors and people were according to the mind of God? This sentiment is one of fearful danger. It denies the catholic character of Scripture, and thus renders it practically useless. The exhortations of the holy apostles continue in force till Jesus shall come again; and the ordinances with which they are connected, were therefore designed for all ages of the Church. The spirituality which affects to say, "Jesus is my Shepherd, I am independent of human instruction, warning, and guidance," is thus discerned in the light of God's word, to be a spurious and false spirituality. He who despises the pastorship, despises not man but God.

These sentiments are objected to also by another and a very different class of persons. There is a spirit of liberalism in the present day, which though professing to

¹ Revelation ii. iii.

acknowledge the Bible, is in truth, essentially infidel. It treats all religion as a matter of opinion; let every man follow his own way, is its maxim, and God will be merciful to the sincere. The man who maintains that his way his right, say the advocates of this philosophy, is a narrow-minded bigot; and to tell us, they add, that we must submit to the instructions of ordained men and receive their word, is nothing better than priestcraft. It is not difficult to shew the infidel character of such sentiments. If Scripture be indeed a revelation from God, doctrinal truth cannot be a matter of mere opinion any more than moral truth. Man's moral duty is plainly written on the conscience; it is not a matter of mere opinion that adultery and murder are criminal; he who shall maintain that it is so, denies the God of nature. And if he is the God of revelation also, his mind and will for the direction of his creatures must be written with equal plainness in that blessed word of life; for the actings of Deity are uniform and harmonious. To maintain the opposite, is to deny revelation altogether. The infidel character of these views may be shewn in another way. They render the holy ministry useless for all practical purposes by taking out of the mouth of the minister any word of certainty, either for the direction or the comfort of the flock. And they asperse by so doing, the character of the blessed God. The minister of Christ is entrusted with the souls of men, as the physician is entrusted with their bodies. A member of our family is labouring under some dangerous disease: we call for the physician, he points out the nature of the ailment, and prescribes the remedies. But he is careful to say while he is doing so, This is merely my opinion; the disease may be the very opposite, and the remedies which I prescribe, are as likely to destroy as save; I am not such a bigot as to speak with any certainty. Would any of us, I ask, who cared for wife or child or friend, suffer ourselves to be thus mocked and trifled with? And yet this is the language which the philosophy now referred to would put into the mouths of Christ's ministers, imputing both folly and cruelty to him who has ordained them for the

comfort of his people. Men will not suffer themselves to be mocked in this way, when their bodies are concerned, because bodily disease is felt to be a real thing; it is because eternity and salvation are mere shadows to the majority of mankind, that such treatment of the soul is both tolerated and approved. There are cases moreover, it ought further to be observed, in which bodily disease baffles the profoundest skill, and when it is not possible in prescribing remedies for it, to use any thing else than the language of uncertainty. But the minister of Christ is never in such a condition as this. God has told him plainly what the soul's disease is, and has put into his hands the one infallible antidote and remedy, commanding him to press it on his people. Let the pastor then be guided by the word of St. Peter, and "speak as the oracles of God;"¹ let the flock learn their duty from the words of St. Paul before us, obeying and submitting themselves to such as have the rule over them.

II. It has been in all ages however the policy of Satan to grind the Church between two millstones, driving men from one extreme to another. There are other sentiments regarding the pastoral office, the very reverse of those whose falsehood and danger have now been pointed out. The pastor, say some, is invested with a mysteriously-sacred character; he is the representative of Christ, sin must be confessed to him, and it is through his intervention that the blessing of reconciliation with God must both be sought and obtained. These views have arrived at their maturity in the Church of Rome, which has elevated the pastor into the place of a mediating priest. St. Paul seems to have been entirely unacquainted with them, if we may judge from his language in the text; he urges submission to their pastors, by simply reminding the Hebrews,—

For they watch for your souls, as they that must give account.

¹ 1 Peter iv. 11.

This was his idea of pastoral duty, of pastoral place and responsibility. And the duty is sufficiently onerous, the place sufficiently dignified, the responsibility sufficiently great; no pastor who knows his own frailty, will for a moment desire any more. This part of the text, let me further observe, qualifies the preceding clause. God has not delivered his flock blind-fold, into the hands of their spiritual guides; these guides "must give account" to him of that which they have delivered in his name. And if they have perverted or adulterated his message of salvation, most fearful shall the account be. It must be remembered also that the flock have access with their pastors, to the record of eternal truth, and if the pastor shall answer to God for having delivered falsehood, the flock most assuredly are not commanded to receive it from his mouth. The epistle now before us, which contains, as we have seen, the most solemn warnings against "divers and strange doctrines," and even threatens excision from the Christian covenant, to those who should be "carried away" by them, was addressed by St. Paul at once to the private members of the different Hebrew Churches, and to their spiritual guides. Both were therefore called upon, by their allegiance to their common Lord, to hear and obey this apostolic word. And if any of the pastors had been led astray of Satan, and had begun to inculcate some of these strange doctrines, the flock were responsible if they listened to an instruction which caused to err from the words of knowledge. To maintain the opposite of this, is to render the beautiful demonstrations, convincing arguments, and solemn warnings of this precious epistle, useless for any practical purpose. The Apostle does indeed say, "Obey... and submit yourselves," as he says in another place, "Children obey your parents in all things;" and in another still, "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord."¹ When these two apostolic canons lay the child and wife respectively under the obligation of blind and unreflecting obedience, the canon of the text may be understood to lay the same on the flock of Christ. But they impose no such

¹ Colossians iii. 20. Ephesians v. 22.

obligation; the child is not commanded to drink poison because a parent presents it, nor the wife to put forth her hand to steal, because a husband enjoins her to do so. And neither is the flock of Christ commanded to receive the poison of soul-destroying error, because a man ordained of God is the channel through which it comes. There are exceptions to every rule; in each of these three cases a higher obligation interferes.¹ Let it however be most carefully observed that the exception in each of them, so far from disannulling, proves and establishes the rule. Those obligations must be indeed of a sacred character with which it is not lawful to dispense, except in cases of such urgent necessity.

May the pastor congratulate himself then on having fulfilled his responsibility, when he has faithfully delivered to his people the counsel of God? He may not; much more than this is implied in the expression, "they watch for your souls." The physician does not think his duty done, when he has simply pronounced on the disease and prescribed the remedy. He watches at once the progress of the malady and the effect of his treatment; he varies that treatment according to the several symptoms which present themselves to his notice; he takes advantage of any symptom of a more favourable character to address the disease with more effect; he brings in short, the whole power of his knowledge, skill, and attention to bear on the one anxious object of restoring his patient to health. And if the conscientious physician watches thus carefully over the body in every case, because human life is always valuable, he does so especially when a life of more than ordinary preciousness is committed to his care. If the Queen of these realms were seized with some dangerous sickness, we well know the anxiety with which her physicians would watch over so precious a life. They could not fail to remember that the eyes of a mighty nation were upon them, and that they should never be forgiven if through their ignorance or inadvertence any fatal result should occur. God was pleased

¹ Acts v. 29.

on one occasion, to snatch from the people of England a princess who was the desire of their eyes, when the nation too was anxiously expecting the birth of an heir to the throne. An impression went abroad that she had fallen a sacrifice to professional inattention; and her unhappy medical attendant, unable to bear the reproaches of a jealous and angry nation, laid hands on his own life. All this is full of instruction. If the life of the body is so precious, what is the value of the soul; if the physician who has charge of the one, watches it so assiduously, what should be the anxiety of the pastor, to whom God has committed the other? His holy duty then is by no means discharged when he has simply declared God's message; he must watch the effect of that message on his people's minds. There will necessarily be found among those committed to him every variety of moral and spiritual condition. Some will be profligate and careless; others will be entirely devoted to a present world, and thoughtless of eternity; another class will be inquiring the way to Zion; and another still will be found believing the holy gospel and walking in the ways of God. He must watch the effect of the word which he proclaims, on all these different classes. Is there any token of relenting in the hard-hearted profligate when the love of God is pressed upon him? is there any sign of fear when the terrors of the Lord are preached? The favourable moment must be seized, and the heart, while yet soft and impressible, must be plied with the exhortations and promises of God's word: salvation may peradventure be the issue. Does the cold-hearted worldling betray any feeling of disappointment with the portion which he has chosen? any desire for something better than the enjoyments which this world can afford? The favourable moment must be seized in his case also; Christ must be presented in his most attractive aspect: the heart may peradventure be won. Does the inquirer shew himself willing to receive Divine instruction? The pastor must never weary to communicate it, both in public and private. Do those among his people who truly love the Lord and serve him, need to be encouraged

in the right way? Their several conditions must also be observed, and the word which is addressed to them must be suited to their respective cases. The Christian pastor in short, must "travail in birth" by night and by day, that Christ may "be formed" in his people, and that the lineaments of his character may appear; he must bring all his knowledge and acquirements to bear on the one anxious object of healing their spiritual maladies and preparing them for the kingdom of God. This is watching for souls. And it is all too little if we consider the words that follow, "as they that must give account." God will demand this account, and it is to him that it must be rendered. This greatly enhances the solemnity of the consideration before us. For no nation loves a monarch, no father loves a child, no husband loves a wife, no human being loves or can love another, as God loves the souls of men. It was a terrible thing for that unhappy physician to whom reference has already been made, when a jealous and high-minded people said, we trusted our beloved one in your hands, and she has sunk into the grave through your remissness. What then shall be his feelings to whom God shall say at last, I trusted in your hands those beloved ones for whom the blood of my Son was shed, and they have perished through your neglect? He will also surely ask, how came they to perish? were they warned and instructed? when the heart was soft, tender, and impressible, was advantage taken of it? was every means used which anxious love could devise, to avert so fearful a catastrophe? Oh what, I again ask, shall be the feelings of the man who can find no answer to such questions? A prospect so awful and solemn is sufficient to drive any man from the holy ministry; for where is the pastor who can answer them as he ought? It is some consolation to find St. Paul asking, "Who is sufficient for these things?" and to hear the royal Psalmist praying, "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God." But if ever when we are desiring to enter into the spirit of our holy calling, we are still constrained to feel thus self-condemned, what shall

be the condemnation at last of the habitually-careless pastor? Woe, woe, woe be unto him; it had been better for such a man if he had never been born.

III. The character which distinguished the Hebrew pastors, is the next thing which appears in the text. They watch over you, says the Apostle, as those who must give account,

That they may do it with joy and not GROANING: for that is unprofitable for you.

I need not remark that such a motive could address itself to the loving heart alone, and that the selfish and worldly-minded could be affected neither by this joy on the one hand, nor by this poignant grief on the other. The Hebrew pastors were therefore men of love; they had taken the oversight of the flock "not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind."¹ The prospect of being able to give a good account of their charge another day, was the animating principle of all their ministerial labours; whilst dread of the possible opposite made them redouble their diligence continually. And such ought to be the character of the Christian pastor still. His faith should anticipate continually the coming of his Lord and Master; he should be animated now by the joyful hope of presenting to Him then a faithful people; he should be stimulated daily by fear of the opposite result. Has the humane physician no joy, when he is able to present to a weeping family, a father, mother, wife, or child, whose restoration to health has been the fruit of his skill and vigilance, and the reward of his unremitted toil? Has he no sorrow on the other hand, when he is obliged to communicate the fatal intelligence that his skill and exertions are alike unavailing to stay the ravages of disease and hinder the approach of death? What then shall be the joy of him who is able to present at last to the great Father of all, his restored and recovered children; children who through his faithful ministry have been raised.

¹ I Peter v. 2.

from the death of sin to the life of righteousness, and are meetened for eternal fellowship with that Saviour who has redeemed them for himself! Well may the prospect of it now animate the pastor in his labours; it shall be a rich and abundant recompense for a whole life of watching, diligence, and care. And what shall be the grief, the groaning anguish of him who is compelled at the great day to announce the opposite result? to say of those on the left hand, I warned and entreated them but they would not hear; I laboured to avert their present fearful catastrophe, but alas I have laboured in vain; they chose their own way, and are now filled with their own devices. But surely that grief which expresses itself in groans, can have no place in the bosoms of those who shall then be found on the right hand of the Judge! It may, for it is written of the blessed, "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."¹ There are tears then which need to be wiped away. Aye, and there are tears which God alone can wipe away; there is a grief to which God alone can administer consolation. And this character belongs to the grief of which we have now been speaking; it mocks all consolation but Divine. We have another striking proof in the words before us that a heart of holy love is the characteristic of "the good shepherd." Your pastors, says St. Paul to the Hebrews, would fain render in their account of you with joy and not with grief, not because they grudge that their labour should be lost, but because "that is unprofitable for you." Would God that my labours were an hundred-fold, says the faithful pastor; it is not of myself, it is of you, ye careless sheep, that I am thinking with sorrow continually. When the humane physician stands beside the afflicted mother, gazing on the mortal remains of the child whom he has in vain endeavoured to preserve to her, he does not say, I have watched for weeks and months over your infant, and have lost my labour. You are heartily welcome, he rather says, to all the skill, labour, and attention which I have endeavoured to bestow, I only grieve with you that they have not led to a different result. And such is

¹ Revelation vii. 17.

the feeling of the truly Christian pastor. He does not repine that he has lost his labour when the flock refuse to hearken to him; it is of them that he is thinking, it is for them that he grieves. This is the case even now, and shall be much more so another day. For his labours shall appear to him as nothing, when he stands before the Chief Shepherd; and the loss of one soul among the flock of which he had the charge, shall in the light of the judgment-seat, appear as every thing. "Oh that he could have heard me!" shall be the ejaculation of the faithful heart, as memory retraces the warnings and admonitions which were bestowed on the careless one in vain. But wishes and ejaculations are then, alas, too late for ever; changeless eternity has begun its ceaseless course.

IV. Having thus seen the office and character of the pastor, we learn in the next place from the text, the bond that subsists in the Church of God, between those who exercise, and those who are subject to authority. St. Paul continues;—

Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly,

Such is the humble request and modest language of the man who "laboured more abundantly" than all the apostles of Jesus.¹ We trust, he says to the Hebrews, speaking for himself and the ministers associated with him, that we have no desire to behave toward you or toward any, save with integrity, uprightness, and honour. But we are frail and fallible men, he continues; and if you wish to see us preserved from the snares of the enemy, and from dishonouring God's holy name, "pray for us." The spirit of these words however, comprehends the pastors of the Hebrew Churches as well as St. Paul and his apostolic brethren. It is ungrateful to human nature to be commanded to obey; and such a command is always associated in Scripture with some consideration to render obedience pleasant. The Hebrews

¹ I Corinthians xv. 10.; II Corinthians xii. 11.

have just been exhorted to submit to their spiritual rulers. But do not imagine, St. Paul would now go on to say, that spiritual rule is tyranny; if I bid you submit to those whom Christ has set over you, I also bid you pray for them. And this blessed bond still connects the pastor and his flock; apostles have ceased from the Church, but spiritual rulers, at once claiming our obedience, and humbly asking our prayers, still remain with her, in the providence of her exalted Head. He who is ashamed to ask the prayers of his flock, has a higher opinion of his knowledge, gifts, and attainments than was entertained by the illustrious Apostle whose words are now before us. He is also ignorant of his danger and of the snares which beset his path; save only for the protection which prayer brings around him, the enemy of his own soul and of the souls of his people, may have at any time the most honoured and exalted minister, and be permitted to sift him as wheat. This important and solemn truth is worthy of our most earnest attention. The path of safety in this dangerous day, lies midway between two extremes: the text has warned us against its ecclesiastical democracy, whether in the spiritual or in the infidel form; it warns us now against its ministerial idolatry. This also assumes a two-fold aspect. It is sometimes personal; the flock worship the gifts, attainments, and eloquence of him who presides over them, and dispute like a Grecian School for the tenets of their master. No tongue of man may tell nor heart conceive, the baleful results of this wide-spread evil. Many a pastor who appeared at the commencement of his ministerial course to run well, and who might have continued to do so, if he had been sustained by the prayers of his people, has been brought to the ground by the weight of an idolatrous congregation, and fallen to rise no more. The way doubtless to prevent this evil, is to venerate the pastor, not as a man but as an ordinance of God. But this veneration also may be carried too far; there is an official as well as a personal idolatry. The pastor cannot be venerated too highly, is the answer of some; he is to us his flock the representative of the Pastor above. This is dangerous

language; no creature can be Christ's representative in the full sense of that word. Official and Essential dignity meet in the great Pastor of the Church. His official dignity results from his relations to the Church and to the world. In these relations he may be and is represented; and the pastor, the father, the husband, and the civil ruler, His earthly shadows, are entitled to a portion of his honour. But in his essential dignity, that which belongs to him as a Divine Person, he cannot be shadowed forth; it is the prerogative of Deity as such, to be unrepresentable in any form. Let us take heed therefore how we draw too close a parallel between the Master and the servants, and reason from the honour due to the one, to the reverence which may be claimed by the other. For there is between Him and them a gulf as wide as that which separates the Creator from the creatures whom he has called into being. The words before us are a striking confirmation of these statements. "Pray for us," is the request of the illustrious Apostle of the Gentiles. When did his Master prefer such a request? when did Jesus say, Pray for me? Was he ashamed to say so? This question needs no reply. He who washed his disciples' feet, and besought the solace of their sympathy in the dark conflict of Gethsemane, and died for them on the accursed tree, was never ashamed to humble himself in every way which truth demanded. But truth forbid him to prefer such a request. Girt about as he was with human frailty and mortality, and dependent continually on his Almighty Father for strength and succour, he had direct access to him as the eternal Son, and needed not the prayers of any. At the point noticed in the text then, the parallel between the Master and the servants completely fails. The under-shepherd and his flock are frail and fallible creatures; as they are dependent on his instructions, so he must be sustained by their continual supplication on his behalf. But no such link exists between the Church and her great Shepherd. Her members absolutely depend on his heavenly instruction and prevalent intercession; but there is no reciprocity; he was on earth, is now, and will be for ever, absolutely independent of them.

V. This brings us to the last thing which we proposed to consider. Christ is the true Pastor, the true provider for the wants of his Church, the only fountain of spiritual mercy and blessing. St. Paul continues;—

But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

I have asked your prayers, he tells them, for myself and my brethren, that we may receive all the strength, grace, and consolation which we need. But I ask them especially at present that I may have the privilege of coming to you again, and renewing in the midst of you my personal instructions and ministry. "All things are your's," my brethren; I and Apollos and Cephas are but instruments in Christ's hand for your good;¹ spread therefore this request before him, pray "the Lord Jesus Christ" to "direct my way unto you."² It is plain from these words that the Hebrew Churches had at one time enjoyed the privilege of the personal ministry of him who was now addressing them. Their exalted Head who perfectly knew their condition, could alone judge infallibly whether the repetition of such a benefit was at that time expedient for them. Some providential circumstance not here explained, was hindering it; but his Almighty Lord and theirs could easily clear the hindrance away. To him therefore the Apostle directs them; if you would have the benefit, he says, of the ministrations of the servant, apply to the Master who holds him in his hand. I need not say that these are catholic truths. The great Pastor of the Church still knows with infallible certainty the spiritual condition of all his people; and all His ministers, from the humblest to the most exalted, are but instruments in His hand for their good. Every spiritual benefit received through a pastor, is therefore to be traced directly to Christ. If we look no further than to the men who speak to us, we shall never learn any thing aright; but if we learn with the holy Psalmist, to say, "THE LORD is my Shepherd," we shall

¹ I Corinthians iii. 21—23.

² I Thessalonians iii. 11.

also say with him, "I shall not want." For we shall meet the Chief Shepherd in his ministers, and hearing in them his gracious voice, we shall be guided, comforted, and established in the good ways of God. And what shall be the sign that this is the case with us? that we are indeed looking through men, to Him who has appointed them? The sign here given is prayer; the Hebrews are desired to ask from the Lord himself the blessing of apostolic ministration. Let us bring this home to our own hearts and consciences, let us see that our souls daily and continually have direct communication with Him who is the Fountain of mercy. No ministry on earth can edify a prayerless people, can comfort a prayerless soul.

We have thus before us the varied lessons of this inestimably-precious scripture. It assigns to the pastor his honoured place as a ruler in the house of God, but it lays upon him at the same time an awful responsibility, points out the character which should distinguish him, addresses him as a frail and feeble creature dependent on the prayers of others, and reminds him that at his best estate he is a feeble instrument in the Chief Shepherd's hands. It lays upon the flock the obligation of subjection to rule, but it tells them at the same time, that this rule has been ordained for their salvation, exhorts them to uphold by their prayers those who are over them in the Lord, and stirs them up to seek through the ministry of these under-shepherds, to attain to personal communion with the great and good Shepherd above. Oh that all pastors and flocks would drink into the spirit of these truly Divine exhortations! The Church below, in her several congregations, would then be a place of blissful training for the glories of the upper Sanctuary. May God of his infinite mercy, grant that it may be so with us!

LECTURE XXXII.

Hebrews xiii. 20, 21.

"Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen."

ST. PAUL has been instructing the Hebrews in the duty which they owed to their pastors; he has been pointing out that these pastors, with all the other ministers who were set over them, were instruments of blessing in the hand of God and of Jesus their Pastor above. To deepen this feeling, and to leave on their troubled minds, as the result of his whole letter, an impression of comfort, thankfulness, and joy, he goes on in the words which we have read, to commend them to the remembrance of the "God of peace," and to the mercy of Jesus, the "great Shepherd of the sheep." No winding up can be conceived more beautiful, more appropriate, more blessed. The Hebrews could not rise from the perusal of a letter with so sweet a termination, without feeling their hearts knit at once to the writer and the writer's God.

There is nothing in the text that is at all peculiar; I shall therefore at once exhibit the fulness of its catholic meaning. Let us consider in the first place, the name here given to God; and in the second place, the provision which he has made that we may know him in the gracious character which

is indicated by that name. These things will enable us to understand in the third place, how we are brought into the actual enjoyment of what the mercy of God has thus provided. And we shall learn in the fourth place, from the last words of the text, that the eternal glory of this mercy belongs to Christ and to Him alone.

I. Now the God of peace.

Peace is both a negative and a positive blessing. It is freedom from trouble and uneasiness; it is conscious, blessed repose. Well then does St. Paul give this name to the blessed God. To be near to him, is to be free from trouble; to lay the aching head upon his bosom, is to enter into rest indeed. But we may be near to God, it is objected, and yet be in trouble. Let him who says so, tell us in what trouble we may be. We may be persecuted for righteousness' sake, it is answered, as the apostles were at the beginning. But persecution is not trouble if the Lord is with us in the fire. "In the world ye shall have tribulation," he said; "but be of good cheer...these things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace."¹ And he fulfilled this gracious assurance. Conscious repose on the bosom of Almighty Love made the face of St. Stephen as they gnashed on him with their teeth, shine like "the face of an angel;" strengthened St. Peter and his brother apostle to depart "from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame;" constrained St. Paul and his fellow-prisoner in the damp dungeon at Philippi, to pray and sing praises to God.² These men, it may however be said, were called in question for God, and their consolation was therefore in proportion; whereas we may be suffering merely under the sicknesses, the bereavements and the other common afflictions to which humanity is exposed. But we have the promise of God's presence in them also if we are faithful, and that presence makes them cease to be troubles. I have read somewhere of a devoted minister of Christ who

¹ John xvi. 33.

² Acts vi. 15. v. 41, xvi. 25.

had been long expecting the death of a darling child. When it was evident that his end was approaching, the father retired to prayer; and as he came forth from his chamber after a while, it was announced to him that the child was dead. But he had found the meaning of the name before us; I could afford to lose a son every morning, was his answer, were I every morning to be as much comforted of God. We are not able, it may be further objected, to keep the Divine commandments as we desire, or we may be in doubt of our acceptance; and surely these are troubles. But in proportion as we draw nigh to God, make his mercy our confidence, and receive his promised grace, these troubles shall vanish away. And the same thing is true of every description of trouble to which the human heart can be conscious; to know God and to be near to him is its sovereign remedy and cure. It is also its only remedy, its only cure; the wide universe affords not for the creature another pillow than the Creator's breast. Experience alas, sad experience abundantly verifies this truth. Men seek happiness in every variety of pursuits and from every variety of objects, and return from all disappointed; if they would acknowledge the truth, they would say with the king of Israel, "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity."¹ Blessed is the man who by means of experience so painfully gathered, is at last shut up to God, and finds the meaning of the name before us; finds him to be the Fountain, the one only Fountain of happiness to the creature whom he has called into being!

II. What provision then has God made that we may know him in this gracious character? The text answers,—

That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, (who has become) THE great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant.

These words tell us that the resurrection of Christ is the provision after which we are inquiring; that it is in raising

¹ Ecclesiastes i. 2.

him from the dead that God has proclaimed himself to be the source of living joy and fountain of happiness to guilty and ruined man. This is very generally overlooked; it is commonly said that God's great provision for our peace, was his delivering Christ to die for us. But Scripture nowhere separates the death of Christ from his resurrection, and always speaks of the latter as the consummation of the former. "It is Christ that died," says St. Paul in another place, "yea rather, that is risen again."¹ Resurrection was indeed the necessary consummation of the Cross; without resurrection, the Cross would have been essentially imperfect and never could have saved mankind. Salvation is being reconciled to God. But we cannot return to God and be reconciled to him, until we are assured of his forgiving mercy; and the Cross by itself, is incapable of giving such assurance. It was indeed the sacrifice for our sins, but no sacrifice can proclaim its own acceptance. And until we know that it has been accepted, we are as far from peace as if it had not been offered. But resurrection comes in to declare this consoling truth; and telling us that God is well-pleased in consequence to forgive iniquity, it bids his guilty creatures draw nigh to him without fear. Salvation is communion with God and present delight in his ways; such communion is our preparation now for dwelling in his presence for ever. But we need some one to lift us up to the enjoyment of this communion, to guide us in these holy ways, and to protect us from the snares of the enemy on every side; we never heard of a sheep which could guide and protect itself, and we are as unable. The Cross then is not salvation; the dead cannot guide us, the dead cannot protect us from harm. He who knows our weakness and helplessness, has committed us therefore to the charge of a Shepherd whom He has raised from the dead, and has become by the gracious act, the author of our eternal peace. Such is the doctrine of the words before us, and the disciples who knew Jesus after the flesh, could have testified from personal experience to its truth. Let us suppose ourselves

¹ Romans viii. 34..

in the midst of them in Jerusalem, on that eventful Sabbath when the grave held their Lord as its prisoner. Should we have found them in peace? St. Peter's last act had been to deny him with oaths and curses; his anxiety *then* must have been to know that his sin was forgiven; and we can well conceive him exclaiming, O that he were here to tell me! He had stood peradventure beside St. John, and assisted him in lowering their common Master from the cross, and in decently composing his hallowed remains on the ground. We can well conceive him in that awful moment, bending over the lifeless body and exclaiming in distraction, my last act was to send a sword through the heart which has now ceased to beat; we can conceive him kissing the cold lips, and exclaiming in increasing anguish, "O that these lips had language," O that they could speak one word, only one, to say that he had forgiven me; we can conceive him prostrate on the ground in despair, saying, Alas it is too late now to wish the past recalled, my injured Master is dead! His brethren would remind him of Christ's parting look of tenderness; but this remembrance, after the awful scene of Calvary, would only add to the bitterness of St. Peter's feelings; the heart would accuse and condemn itself and refuse to take any comfort. And though the other disciples had not his peculiar grief, we should not have found them rejoicing; "Ye shall weep and lament," was the word of Jesus, "but the world shall rejoice." Had we gone into the palace of the high-priest or into the dwellings of the Scribes and Pharisees on that memorable day, we should have heard the language of unholy triumph; had we descended into the dark domains beneath, we should have found Satan and his angels holding jubilee; He whom men and devils hated, was now brought to the dust of death. But it was far otherwise with those faithful ones to whom he was all in all; with the doors of their humble sanctuary closed fast for fear of violence, they abandoned themselves to weeping and lamentation. He is gone, they said, who spake to us the words of eternal life, who taught us to pray, who guided us in the way to heaven. He counselled us in our difficulties, they said

again, he encouraged us when cast down, he protected us when in danger; but now he is gone away, and to whom can we, the comfortless and unfriended ones, betake ourselves? But their Lord had also promised, "Your sorrow shall be turned into joy."¹ And it was turned into joy on the memorable morning of the first day of the week. Had we seen them on the evening of that day, we should scarcely have recognized the mourners of the day preceding. They were then overwhelmed with grief; we should have found them now almost out of themselves with wonder, joy, and thanksgiving. Let us go into the midst of them and ask the reason of this transition; they answer with one heart and voice, *THE GOD OF PEACE HATH BROUGHT AGAIN FROM THE DEAD OUR LORD JESUS*. And they had good cause for this exceeding joy. The very first message of his risen Lord must have removed a load from St. Peter's faithful breast. "Go your way," said the angel to the women, "tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him."² That disciple was thus mentioned by name, to assure him of his Master's mercy, to tell him that Christ's parting look of tenderness expressed the genuine intentions of his heart, that the past was freely pardoned, and should be remembered no more for ever. And we have a most beautiful example in his case, of the effect of this gracious assurance on the truly Christian heart. For the disciples did go into Galilee according to the angel's direction, and Christ discovered himself to them as they were fishing on the lake of Tiberias. St. Peter no sooner recognized him, than anticipating even the loving St. John, "he girt his fisher's coat" round his person, "and did cast himself into the sea."³ For the fire of grateful love was burning in his heart; he was impatient to throw himself at his risen Master's feet, impatient to acknowledge his risen Master's kindness. Nor can we question for a moment that he was graciously received. Those lips which had been so lately closed in death, had now found their language, and were able to pour on the repentant sinner the tenderness of

¹ John xvi. 20.² Mark xvi. 7.³ John xxi. 1—7.

his forgiving God. And the joy of St. Peter was only in part peculiar to himself; his fellow-disciples had found along with him that friend who had been dearer than a brother. As their understandings moreover were opened to understand the Scriptures during the forty days that he abode with them and explained the things pertaining to the kingdom of God, their joy in the risen Saviour must have proportionally increased. For they must have been led to regard his resurrection as stamping acceptance on his sacrifice,—as the Father's testimony that the blood of his Son had cleansed them. They were also assured by himself that he would be with them to the end; that he would instruct their ignorance, guide them in difficulty, comfort them when discouraged, preserve them from every snare and evil work, and bring them at last to a city of eternal habitation. They were assured that while he lived, they should never want a friend, and (transporting thought!) they were assured also that he lived for evermore. It is not possible for human language to express the joy which must have flowed like a river, through the hearts of the once despairing disciples, as they went on to understand these things; they could indeed have testified from personal and blessed experience, that it was the God of peace who had brought again their Lord from the dead. Nor is it otherwise with ourselves. The Cross proclaims the love of that Saviour who gave himself as a sacrifice for our sins; but it is in his resurrection "by the glory of the Father,"¹ that we recognize the broad seal of heaven, attesting, as has been already stated, that the offered sacrifice is also accepted above. It is resurrection then which lifts the load from the burdened heart, and bids the penitent rejoice. The Cross by itself is like St. Peter's remembrance of his slain Master's look of tenderness; the Cross followed by resurrection, declares that this tender love has accomplished its gracious object; that it has propitiated the Most High, and obtained everlasting mercy for as many as flee to it for refuge. The message of the blessed gospel is therefore to every penitent what the announcement of the

¹ Romans vi. 4.

angel was to the troubled and sorrowing apostle; yea the charge to the women, "Tell Peter that he is risen from the dead," was not more personal and particular than the charge given to God's ministers now. And the effect on the believing heart is the same. We hasten to throw ourselves at our risen Saviour's feet; take us, Lord, we exclaim, and use us for thy glory; we are thine now, and would be thine for ever. Oh blessed moment of new-born joy and love! But alas, it is not to continue. We no sooner begin to serve the Lord than we learn by painful experience that we are ignorant, weak and helpless; that we need some one to teach and strengthen us, to preserve us from the snares of the enemy, and to lead us in the ways of God. The blessed gospel however again points to the risen Saviour. He will teach and strengthen you, it says; he will preserve you from the snares of the enemy; he will guide you now by his providence and grace, and bring you at last to the promised kingdom of glory. While he lives, it declares, you shall never want a friend; and his years are the years of eternity, he lives for evermore. Herein indeed is consolation. Tempted, troubled Christian, what canst thou lack more? He of whom the gospel testifies, is not like the poor under-shepherds of whom thou hast just heard. They are "silly sheep" themselves, and require another's guardianship; and with all their watchfulness and care, it is a very partial charge which they can take. HE is "THE GREAT Shepherd." His omniscience knows thy goings out and in, and the most secret feelings of thy heart; knows thy weakness and discouragements, thy trials and temptations; his wisdom knows when to stretch forth for thine aid the ever ready arm of omnipotent and eternal might. Fear not to make him the Object of thy confidence; he is worthy of it all. The whole flock of God is committed into his hand, led by his Spirit and protected by his power; yea he knows every one of them by name. Vast continents may separate them from each other, and "grim oceans" roll between; but nothing can hide the least of them from the observation of his unslumbering eye. That eye is now resting upon us, and

rests equally on those in the Antipodes who call upon his name. For he has a flock in the Antipodes; there is a people in once-barbarous and bloody New Zealand, who "to the praise of the glory of his grace," now know and believe in him as the Saviour. And the whole earth from sea to sea and shore to shore, shall yet be one flock under him its one Shepherd. May the God of peace who brought him again from the dead, be pleased in His goodness to hasten that glorious day!

But the omniscience and omnipotence of Deity are not his only qualifications for this office of exalted love. He has become the Shepherd of the sheep "by the blood of the everlasting covenant," i. e. the flock is entrusted to his care because he laid down for them his precious life. I have spoken, the Apostle would say, O ye Hebrews, of the pastors whom God has set over you, and have exhorted you to be subject to them, because "they watch for your souls:" how much more then may I exhort you to submit yourselves to this great Shepherd, who not only watches for your salvation, but shed his blood to save you! Herein indeed is abundant consolation for the troubled people of God. When we look to Christ in distress, perplexity, and danger, it is not possible that we should look in vain. Be not afraid, thou tempted one; the ear of him who died for thee is ever open to thy cry, he cannot look on with indifferent eyes and see the roaring lion devour thee. Thy salvation and that of all who should make his mercy their hope, was the reward assured to him in "the everlasting covenant," "the joy set before him," for which he shed his blood. And in teaching thine ignorance, in guiding thee in the ways of God, and preserving thee safe from every evil work, he has the reward of his cross and sepulchre, the meet reward of love. He who is set forth to us in the text, is thus the good as well as the great Shepherd, for "the good Shepherd giveth his life for the sheep."¹ If omniscience, omnipotence, and infinite wisdom are conspicuous in him, Almighty love, love strong as death, is conspicuous also. And surely then it requires

¹ John x. 11.

no further proof that he who has raised from the dead and set such a Shepherd over us, has earned by the gracious act, the name of "the God of peace."

III. Let us now inquire further how we are brought into the actual enjoyment of this peace. The text proceeds;—

Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ.

For no other end than that which is indicated in these words, has the vast machinery of redemption been set in motion. The Son of God left his Father's bosom, sorrowed, travailed, and died on this wretched earth, rose again and received the Holy Ghost, that we, God's apostate family of mankind, might love and serve and glorify him once again. He who esteems this a light matter, is of another mind from God and from Jesus the Son of God. The glory of God and our happiness also meet in one; it is by writing on our hearts this law of love and obedience, and implanting in us the Spirit of his Son, that God makes us partakers of that peace which he has provided for the sons of men in him whom he has raised from the dead. This will appear more fully, as we consider the prayer before us. It divides itself into two parts; St. Paul prays for the Hebrews that they may be influenced by the love of God, and filled with the Spirit of Jesus. Obedience to God is by nature irksome to us. But when the sacred fire of Divine love is lighted in our bosoms, what was a weariness before, becomes our joy and privilege. And that sacred fire is lighted from himself; "we love him, because he first loved us."¹ His name, "The God of peace," declares his love to us; and it is in the resurrection of Christ from the dead that this love has been openly manifested. When he therefore shines into our hearts, revealing this gracious name and shedding abroad this blessed love, he draws our affections irresistibly to himself, and makes us perfect, i.e. thoroughly disposes us

¹ I John iv. 19.

"in every good work, to do his will." This is the first part of St. Paul's prayer. And the second is like unto it. We have no strength in ourselves to walk in the ways of God; and even though we are disposed to serve him, we are conscious of a law in our members warring against the law of our mind.¹ But he who has put the desire into our hearts, enables us also, in measure at least, to fulfil it, working in us, as the Apostle teaches elsewhere, "both to will and to do of his good pleasure."² This effectual working is declared in the words before us, to be ³through Jesus Christ." For the Son of God in ascension-glory, has "received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost,"⁴ that his people anointed from above, may walk and live to the praise and glory of God. And he who has raised him from the dead and anointed him, enables us to follow the footsteps of his holiness, by making us through him, partakers of the same anointing. We can well understand therefore why St. Paul having desired for the Hebrews, that their hearts might be thoroughly disposed to do God's will, desires also grace on their behalf, that they might have strength to carry out into the daily acts of life this filial and holy disposition. There is a most beautiful connection between the two parts of the prayer; and we trace the same connection throughout the entire Scripture. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children," says the Saviour, "how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?"⁴ In these words, let us observe, it is a Father who bestows, and a child who asks the Spirit. Nothing save the knowledge of the fatherly love of God, will teach a human being to ask the Holy Ghost. But when that love shines into our hearts and captivates our affections, it awakens the filial cry, Give us thy Spirit that we may serve thee. And that cry is answered by the holy unction descending from above, by our heavenly Father working in us that which is well-pleasing in his sight. It was thus that the Hebrews were to find peace; and there is no other way to it now. For this is spiritual-mindedness; and "to be

¹ Romans vii. 23. ² Philipians ii. 13. ³ Acts ii. 33. ⁴ Luke xi. 13.

spiritually-minded," says the Apostle elsewhere, "is life and peace."¹ God himself cannot alter this, as he cannot make another God. It belongs to Deity as such, to be the fountain of joy; and it is therefore an eternal impossibility that peace should be found away from him.

IV. Having mentioned Jesus Christ, the Apostle adds,—

To whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

These words plainly teach us that for the peace of which he has spoken, we are indebted to Christ and to him alone. His name is Jesus, i. e. God our Saviour, for he took on him our nature that he might reveal the Father's love, and put away our sins. His name is Christ, i. e. the anointed One, for he rose from the dead on our behalf, and received the Holy Ghost that we might live to God. He is thus the author of our peace in life, our peace in death, and our peace in eternity. To him we owe it if we are cheered now by the knowledge of our heavenly Father's kindness, and are going in and out before him as the accepted children of his love. To him we shall owe it if we find peace in death; if when heart and flesh are failing, amid the sinkings and faintings of a death-bed, we are enabled to look up and say, "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever."² And to him we shall owe it if we find peace in eternity. "Blessed are the pure in heart," says our Saviour; "they shall see God."³ This beatific vision is the peace of eternity. But who shall describe its blessedness? The great master of English song, speaking of God in his temple above, says with almost inspired felicity of expression,—

"About him all the sanctities of heaven
Stood thick as stars, and from his sight received
Beatitude past utterance."

And if this is the case with unfallen angels, what shall we say of the redeemed saints? He whom they shall be privileged to see is the Father of Jesus, the God who

¹ Romans viii. 6.

² Psalms lxxiii. 26.

³ Matthew v. 8.

brought again their gracious Shepherd from the dead. The sight of him must be eternal peace indeed. In the simpler language of the hymn,—

“*HIS PRESENCE* fills each heart with joy,
Tunes every mouth to sing;
By day, by night, the sacred courts
With glad hosannas ring.”

And as long as these hosannas shall continue, as long as the blessedness which inspires them shall endure, so long shall we continue debtors to Jesus Christ, debtors to him alone.

When I say to him alone, I do not exclude the Father; for we may never forget that grace which brought again our Shepherd from the grave. But to be indebted to Christ is to be indebted to the Father; the Redeemer himself has testified, “I and my Father are one.”¹ I only mean to say that to God manifested in Christ the Saviour, belongs the whole glory of our peace; that it cannot be traced to any thing which we have done in the past, can do now, or may do in the future. And this conclusion shall not be altered by any increase of knowledge. When we shall pass into the world of spirits, and see things as they really are in the light of eternal truth, knowing as we are known, we shall only be more convinced that it is so, and be constrained “for ever and ever” to ascribe all glory to Jesus. I trust that no reader's heart finds any objection to this statement. I trust that no one is saying, My life of honesty, uprightness, and piety is the cause of my peace now, will sustain me, I hope, in death, and obtain for me the reward of glory. Whosoever thou art that sayest so, thou hast not been taught of God, for thou speakest not the language of Zion. St. Paul concludes the text with the expressive word, “Amen,” i. e. so be it. When the law was promulgated to Israel, the people were required to say Amen in token of their assent to it; and dissent on such an occasion, would have separated a man from the congregation of the Lord. The Apostle in

¹ John x. 30.

like manner, having ascribed the glory of our peace to Christ, adds his own hearty assent that it should be so, and that of all the Israel of God. He who cannot say Amen along with him, is not of the true circumcision now, and shall not enter into their blessed society above. For the jarring notes of his harp, should he attempt to praise, would disturb the melody of the harps around him which sound only the honours of the Lamb.

Let our prayer for ourselves then be that of St. Paul for the Hebrews. Let us lift up our hearts to him who brought again our Lord Jesus from the dead, that he may commend his love to our hearts and consciences, and fill us with his Holy Spirit. We shall thus be disposed and enabled for every good and righteous work; and finding our joy on earth in communion with our heavenly Father, we shall be prepared, when earth is no more, for the vision of his glory in heaven. May he grant this to each one of us of his infinite mercy!

LECTURE XXXIII.

Hebrews xiii. 22—25.

“ And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation : for I have written a letter unto you in few words. Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty ; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you. Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you. Grace be with you all. Amen.”

SUCH are the concluding verses of the epistle to the Hebrews. They are strongly marked by Christian love ; the meekness and gentleness of Christ appearing in them, rather than the dignity and authority of the Apostle. He beseeches rather than commands them to suffer the word of exhortation ; he speaks of Timothy as his brother and theirs ; he bids them present his affectionate and dutiful commendations to their pastors and all Christian people, and sends to them the commendations of the saints in Italy. Finally, he expresses his desire that God's grace may be with them all ; and to increase the intensity of this expression of Christian benevolence, appends to it his hearty Amen.

There is only one of these verses which has peculiar reference to the Hebrews ; but like every other word in the epistle, it admits of a catholic application. I allude to the second verse of the text, which is scarcely intelligible as it stands in our translation. I believe that it ought to be read thus,—

Know ye that our brother Timothy IS SENT AWAY ; with whom, IF HE RETURN SHORTLY, I will see you.

This epistle seems to have been written during St. Paul's imprisonment at Rome; he seems also to have written from the same prison his epistles to the Philippians and to Philemon. That it was shortly before the termination of that imprisonment, is evident from the intention of soon visiting the Hebrews which he expresses in the words before us. He expresses the same confidence in the other two epistles, bidding Philemon even prepare a lodging for him.¹ And there is one circumstance mentioned in his epistle to the Philippians which throws great light on the meaning of the verse before us. While expressing a hope that he should soon be permitted to visit them, he declares his intention to send Timothy to inquire after their welfare.¹ We have no reason to doubt that he fulfilled this intention, depriving himself of the society of his brother who was then with him at Rome, for the benefit of the Philippian Church. And he seems to have employed the leisure and comparative solitude of his prison-hours, during Timothy's absence, in writing this epistle to the Hebrews. But he was now expecting very speedily both his personal liberation from imprisonment and the return of Timothy from Philippi. If I am not disappointed in this hope, he says, my brother and I will visit you in company; and should there be any thing in what I have now written which is hard to be understood, we will endeavour to make it plain. Meanwhile I beseech you to receive my exhortation, though the words are few, compared with the vastness and glory of the subject. And may the grace of God be with you that you may stand fast in the faith of his holy gospel, and walk in his blessed ways!

With the exception just stated, the text applies equally to ourselves: let us take it therefore verse by verse.

And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation: for I have written a letter unto you in few words.

The word of exhortation here referred to, I need not say, is this epistle. We have just finished the consideration of

¹ Philippians ii. 19—24.; Philemon 22.

it; let us pause and reflect on its contents. The first idea presented to us was that he who had spoken in past ages by prophets, was now speaking by his Son. The dignity of the Son, as very and eternal God, was then pointed out. We were also instructed in his love. This glorious Being, we were told, clothed himself with mortal flesh for our sakes, entered into personal experience of our afflictions, sorrows, and temptations, and laid down his life for our redemption. "But God raised Him from the dead." And he was commended in the next place to our believing consideration, as the prophet raised up, like unto Moses,¹ and yet better than he; the Divine "leader and commander"² whom God has given to his people, to guide them into that everlasting Canaan which is reserved as the inheritance of the just. But besides being God's Apostle, i. e. His Sent One, he is also the High-Priest of his Church. It was therefore next pointed out to us that in this sacred character he was like unto Aaron and yet better than he. He is like that venerable father of the Jewish priesthood, because he was called of God, because he was compassed with the infirmity of those for whom he mediates, because he presents the blood of a sacrifice on our behalf, and brings back to us the fulness of God's blessing. He is better than him and his sons, because he is High-Priest after the order of Melchizedec, who blessed even the patriarch Abraham in right of the acknowledged Superior. God also spake of raising up his priesthood whilst that of Aaron yet existed, declared that he should be priest for ever, and consecrated him as such with an oath. The priests of Aaron's house were mortal men, and held their office by succession; his priesthood is untransferable, for he lives for evermore. His qualifications are also more excellent than theirs, for he was without sin; and his mediation has respect to nobler objects, for he presents an efficacious sacrifice, and obtains a real pardon. In token that the sacrifices of the priests of Aaron's house could not pacify the conscience or bring us into the liberty of the children of God, the holiest of all continued shut,

¹ Deuteronomy xviii. 15—18.; Acts iii. 22—26.² Isaiah lv. 4.

“whilst the first tabernacle kept its standing.” These priests were also enjoined to repeat them continually, that their utter inefficacy might be openly declared. But sacrifice has now ceased by express Divine command, to testify that its object is accomplished for ever; the vail is rent in consequence, and the holiest is thrown open for all.

Such is the doctrine contained in this epistle. It is however a “word,” not of doctrine merely, but “of exhortation;” for St. Paul, having laid down these fundamental principles, passed on, as we have seen, to admonition, encouragement, and warning. He exhorted us to press into God’s presence with filial boldness through Jesus Christ, and to seek the cleansing of his holy Spirit that we might go in and out before him as the accepted children of his love. He exhorted us also to hold fast our faith in this holy gospel, assuring us that by its power we should be made more than conquerors over every difficulty and attain to glory in the end. He then proceeded to explain the nature of faith, as confidence in the word of God; he also pointed out its results and reward, obedience to God, and the Divine approbation. The experience of the righteous for four thousand years was appealed to, in attestation of the truth of these statements. The example and experience of Christ himself was next brought forward; and we were urged to look to him for strength, that we might follow him and his sainted ones in the path which leads to glory. We were told not to regard the malice of the Devil or his servants; we were reminded that God turns all which they can do against us, to our present and everlasting benefit. We were encouraged therefore not to despond when in sorrow, but to make it the care of our lives to glorify and please God; we were warned and entreated not to sell for any earthly price our place in his covenant of salvation. For he who had proved himself so abundant in goodness and truth, was, we were reminded, “a consuming fire” to those who despise his love.

The Apostle then proceeded to press duty more especially on our attention. He spake of brotherly love, humanity, and hospitality, domestic purity and contentment. He bade

us be willing as Christians, to bear Christ's reproach; he exhorted us as members of the Church to submit with docility to the pastors whom God had set over us. Finally, he reminded us of that great Shepherd whom the God of peace has set over the flock of his pasture, and commended us to his mercy and blessing.

It is indeed a proof of the admirable humility of the apostles of Christ, and that, as St. Paul himself has declared, they were "gentle" among the Churches, "as a nurse cherisheth her children,"¹ that at the close of so precious an epistle, an epistle so rich both in doctrine and precept, the writer should beseech those to whom it was addressed, to "suffer" i. e. to take it in good part. And this entreaty is addressed to us also, and to the Catholic Church to the end of time. The Apostle "being dead yet speaketh," imploring us from the tomb to receive his testimony for the Saviour. He apologizes as it were to the Hebrews, for the briefness of his communication. It was brief indeed compared with the largeness of his love to them, and with the vastness and glory of the truths which it commended to their regard. And it must be pronounced brief still, if compared with its mighty subject. But brief as it is, it contains every truth of salvation; we shall search all the other Scriptures in vain for any essential article of the faith which is not contained in it. It sets forth the fallen state of man; the fatherly compassion with which God regards him; the Divinity and humanity of the Saviour; the cleansing virtue of his blood and efficacy of his intercession; salvation by faith in his name and sanctification by the power of his Spirit; the glory also which shall be revealed at his appearing, as the eternal heritage of the just. We may well then be entreated to receive this word of eternal life. If we have listened to the truths contained in it without interest; without the affections being gained for God; without being led to seek after Christ and salvation, our blood is on our own heads. For in going through this precious Scripture, and considering its sentence by sentence, we have had declared to us all the counsel of God.²

¹ I Thessalonians ii. 7.

² Acts xx. 26, 27.

We have another proof in the text, of the gentleness of apostolic rule; St. Paul proceeds;—

Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints.

He would have them carry to their pastors and to all who fear God, his affectionate commendation and greeting. These pastors with every member of their churches were under apostolic authority, but he would sink the character of apostle in that of brother and friend; he recognized this as his relation both to them and their people; "Our brother Timothy," he says, "is sent away." Still however, let it be carefully observed, he recognizes the existence of rule, and has charged them, as we have already seen, to obey and submit themselves. Here then we have again set before us the middle path of safety between two opposite and equally dangerous errors. If democracy in the state is evil, democracy in the Church is mischievous beyond expression. "The time will come," says St. Paul elsewhere, "when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears." And in consequence of this state of things, of men judging the word and ruling the minister, instead of suffering the word to judge and the minister to rule them, "they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.¹ But whilst this is true on the one hand, we must never forget on the other that one is our Master, even Christ, and that we are all brethren.² Rule in the Church is therefore the rule of love, and submission in the Church is equally the submission of love. A brother rules and watches over brethren as one who shall give account; brethren receive a brother's teaching, and are subject to his authority for love and conscience-sake. The union of these two precious elements so essential to the well-being of the Church of God, appears in the text before us, and in all St. Paul's epistles. If he was permitted to accomplish the

¹ II Timothy iv. 3, 4.

² Matthew xxiii. 8.

purpose which he here intimates, and to visit the Hebrews in company with Timothy, we can conceive him sitting in their dwellings beside them, partaking of their brotherly hospitality, and explaining to them those things in this very epistle, which even St. Peter acknowledges were "hard to be understood."¹ We can conceive him, I repeat, explaining in simple brotherly discourse, the mystery of the essential glory and temporary humiliation of Messiah; we can conceive him melting into tenderness as he enlarged on the depth of that humiliation, the prayers and supplications of Jesus, his strong crying and tears; we can conceive him kindling into ecstatic eloquence as he spake of the Melchizedec priesthood and the glories of the eternal reign. We can conceive this "Hebrew of the Hebrews" patiently hearing every objection which could be advanced by his own nation to the doctrine which he had laid down, bearing with their prejudiced partiality in favour of the legal covenant, the ordinances of Moses, and the priesthood of Aaron's family, and seeking to lead them gradually and gently to a fuller apprehension of the mind and purposes of God. But if any of them had answered, We also have the Scriptures in our hands and will be guided by our own interpretation of them; we do not reject Jesus but we will still seek salvation in part by the ordinances of our own law, this meek and gentle minister would have assumed at once the authority of his holy office, "BEHOLD, I PAUL SAY UNTO YOU," would have been his word, "that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing."² And these two elements must still be combined by every servant of Christ, in his daily intercourse with his flock and stated ministrations among them. He must not seek to overbear them by authority; he must not appeal to his holy office as his proof of the doctrines which he propounds. His word ought to enlighten the understandings of his people, to convince their reason, to comfort and cheer their hearts; and they should thus be led on by him, step by step, to a larger and yet larger apprehension of the counsel and will of God. But if he sees them to be

¹ II Peter iii. 15, 16.² Galatians v. 2.

heady and high minded, disposed to instruct themselves in Divine truth and confident in their own opinions, a regard to their safety requires that he should stand in the dignity of his office, pronouncing authoritatively what is truth, and warning against error. Let him do this with a solemn sense of the awful responsibility which lies upon him; for every word which he speaks, he must one day answer to God. But let him do it with decision and fearlessly; he who shrinks from such responsibility, is unfit for the office which he holds.

There are other lessons however which may be learned from the words before us. The charge contained in them to salute their spiritual rulers, implies that this epistle was addressed not to the pastors, but to the flock. Now it is a very common objection that the dogmas of theological science are for the clergy only; we of the laity, it is said, cannot be expected to understand them. But why should we rank ourselves because we bear no holy office, below the private members of those Churches to whom this epistle was addressed? St. Paul expected them to understand its contents, to follow its reasonings and to perceive the force of its demonstrations; and if St. Paul were now on earth, he would have expected us to do the same. It is true that theology is a science, as medicine also is a science; the care of the soul also, like that of the body, is committed to those who make it their especial charge. But both sciences concern every individual man. If we despise the discoveries of medicine and refuse the directions of the physician, we shall bring sickness and death on our bodies; if we despise the revelations of Christianity, and refuse the word of its ministers when they would point out to us the way of life, we shall bring eternal death on our souls. The truths of salvation are committed to God's ministers that they may teach their flocks to know them, and that their flocks in knowing them may live. It is one of the worst evils of the Church of Rome, that she prostrates the spirits of redeemed men before a privileged order. Christ never instituted such an order; "Ye shall know the truth," is his

word to all who believe on him, "and the truth shall make you free." Let us all rise up into this freedom. Let us know God for ourselves, and not on a fellow-creature's word; let us seek the personal teaching of his Holy Spirit, that we may be established in the knowledge of his will; let us go in and out before him in the conscious liberty of adoption. The best reward of the humane physician is to see the bloom of health reappearing on his patient's cheek; and the best reward of the faithful minister is when he can bring up a people to the personal knowledge and personal enjoyment of God.

From this personal knowledge of God and personal delight in him, the mutual love of the body of Christ takes its rise. We find this also recognized in the text;—

They of Italy salute you.

'This was no formal greeting, but the expression of an affection which, if need were, would have proved itself in act. For Christianity in Italy and Christianity in Greece were one; the knowledge of the same redeeming love, the fruit of the Spirit of the same Saviour. When those very Hebrew Churches to whom this salutation was sent, were in distress, the believers in Macedonia and Achaia exerted themselves to the utmost to supply their wants.* Those of Macedonia did so at much personal sacrifice; for they themselves were in affliction and deep poverty, and must have surrendered even the necessaries of life for their poor brethren in Judea.³ And they made these sacrifices for those whom every Gentile prejudice had taught them to despise, whose faces they had never seen, of whom they knew nothing save that they were believers in the Lord. This blessed bond of Christian love connected all the early Churches of the saints. St. Paul in writing to the Church at Philippi, sends to them the especial commendations of the saints "of Cæsar's household."⁴ For even in the

* John viii. 32.

³ Romans xv. 25, 26.

² II Corinthians viii. 1—4.

⁴ Philippians iv. 22.

household of haughty Cæsar, the Redeemer's name was revered, and the Redeemer's people, though far distant from them and never seen in the flesh, were tenderly beloved for his sake. It is needless to say that Christianity is the same still. If we therefore have known and believed in the Saviour, the conscious heirship of a common salvation will teach us thus to love His people.

The Apostle was deeply aware that this Divine religion, the doctrines and precepts of which he has set before us in this epistle, and whose lovely features are so conspicuous in the text, could have place in human hearts only by the grace of God. He therefore concludes his word of exhortation by saying to the Hebrews,—

Grace be with you all.

This grace, I need not say, is as needful for us as for them. The mind of man by nature, grovels on the earth; it is by the Spirit of grace alone that it can be raised to the contemplation of heavenly things, and fitted for the enjoyment and holy service of God. If the Hebrews were tempted to forsake their Saviour by the persecution, affliction, and reproach which confession of his name entailed upon them, we are exposed to opposite but not less dangerous temptations. Peace and quiet surround us on every side, and that world which sought to terrify the Hebrews by its cruelties, is now seeking to seduce us by its smiles. There is fearful danger of the attempt being successful; of our "hearts being overcharged with cares of this life,"¹ and our coming short thereby of the life which is to come. The peculiar character of the present day renders this danger more imminent and pressing. It is a day of enterprise and activity beyond all example; men's minds are entirely engrossed with earthly things and with the eager pursuit of gain. It may be truly said of us,—

"We toil and we slave, till we drop in the grave,
And all for the lust of gold."

¹ Luke xxi. 34.

This evil is increased by another feature of the times. The anxieties of trade and commerce were formerly confined to one class, those directly engaged in them; but all classes of the community now begin to have their share in these anxieties, for the whole capital of the nation is becoming invested in trading and commercial schemes. The spirit of commerce is thus fast pervading us as a people; and there is, alas, no spirit so unfavourable to heavenly and Divine contemplation, or so fearfully fitted by its engrossing character and harassing cares, to incapacitate for the service of God. I pray God that England's commercial prosperity may not occasion the loss of the souls of England's children. Placed then in the midst of this vortex, and exposed to its fearful dangers, let us prefer on our own behalf, the prayer of the Apostle for the Hebrews; let us earnestly ask that the grace of God may be with us.

And let us not say that this grace is for a favoured few only; St. Paul prays for the Hebrews, "Grace be with you all." He offered this prayer for the baptized then in Palestine; he would have offered it for us, God's baptized people in England, if he had been now alive upon the earth. It expressed Christ's desire on their behalf, it expresses it equally on ours; if we are without this grace, the lack is not in Him. "Ask, and it shall be given you," are His words, "seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: every one that asketh receiveth;" for God "will have all men to be saved."¹ We have a striking proof of this in the universal character of the obligation which is laid by God himself on the human family. "Kings of the earth, and all people; princes, and all judges of the earth: young men, and maidens; old men, and children" are commanded to praise his name.² That name is "The Lord God, merciful and gracious, forgiving iniquity and transgression,"³—the God with whom there is forgiveness that he may be feared; and surely he who has given such a command to his creatures, is not sparing either of his pardoning mercy or of that

¹ Matthew vii. 7, 8.; I Timothy ii. 4.

² Psalms cxlviii. 11—13.

³ Exodus xxxiv. 6.

sanctifying grace by which alone this charge can be obeyed. Why then should not all of us be found rejoicing in his love and walking in his fear? Why should not old and young, fathers, mothers and children, husbands and wives, masters and servants among us, be partakers of his grace? What should hinder any one who has been baptized in the name of Jesus, from being sanctified by his Spirit, preserved from the snares and temptations around him, and brought at last safe to the eternal kingdom? There is nothing to hinder it. God our Maker and Christ our Saviour would have it so; an apostle yearning over the Churches "in the bowels of Jesus Christ," would have had it so, in his day; and every faithful servant of Jesus desires to see it now. Satan our destroyer, and he alone, would have it to be otherwise. Let us have no hard thoughts of our God. His Apostle expresses the mind and gives utterance to the compassionate desire of him who died for us and rose again, when he prays in the words of the text "Grace be with you all."

This precious epistle contains one word more, which we are not to regard as an unmeaning expletive. To the prayer which he has thus offered for the Hebrews, the Apostle adds,—

Amen.

The Amens of the inspired writers occur sometimes in connection with the announcement of a Divine purpose, and at other times, in connection with a prayer. They are an expression in the former case, of hearty consent; in the latter, of earnest desire. We had amen in the first sense, in the immediate context; we have it in the second, in the words which we are now considering. For St. Paul could not pray that the grace of God might be with the Hebrews, without pouring his whole soul into the petition. We need not ask the reason of this earnestness. He knew the issues which were at stake, the interests which depended on this prayer being heard on their behalf. He could not doubt that if that grace was with them, they should be preserved

from every snare and evil work, and brought at last to God's heavenly kingdom; he was equally aware that if left to the imaginations of their own depraved and unbelieving hearts, they would draw back from the Saviour and fall under his eternal wrath. And he was aware of these things not as an unconcerned observer of their condition, but as one who longed after them "all in the bowels of Jesus Christ." The same issues are at stake still, and every true-hearted servant of Jesus must, in measure at least, be of one mind with St. Paul. It is a solemn thing to look on human beings, to remember that they are formed for immortality, and that God's Fatherly smile or his Judicial frown shall be the portion of each one of them for ever. What heart shall conceive the difference between these two conditions! It is not often that God repeats his words; but in setting forth the blessedness of the saved and the misery of the lost, he does repeat them, as if even He was conscious that no language could express the truth. "I heard a voice from heaven," says the beloved Apostle, "saying, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord: YEA, SAITH THE SPIRIT, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."¹ And let us observe the equal emphasis of the opposite announcement. "I will forewarn you," says our Lord Jesus, "whom ye shall fear: Fear him, who after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; YEA, I SAY UNTO YOU, Fear him."² Those before whom these opposite destinies are placed, are moreover our fellow-creatures, possessed of the same capacities of happiness and of pain with ourselves. The faithful servant of Christ has this in remembrance continually, and the thought fills his soul at once with sadness and with tender compassion. He knows also the dangers which beset his people's path. Faith can discern their restless enemy eyeing his victims every moment; preparing, especially for the young and inexperienced, his snares, temptations and wiles; ready, should they escape one snare, with another and another and yet another in reserve; exhausting the resources of hellish wisdom to

¹ Philipians i. 8.² Revelation xiv. 13.³ Luke xii. 5.

accomplish their eternal destruction. And where shall the under-shepherd who watches for their souls, find relief from this frightful contemplation? It is not in looking on his flock; they are as unable to contend with this terrible enemy as the lamb with the hungry wolf, or his defenceless prey with the roaring lion. It is found only in looking upwards; if God is with them, he knows that they shall be more than conquerors. But alas, there is still an uncertainty; will they invoke his aid, will they have wisdom to look to him for help? Or shall the enemy prevail to blind their minds and harden their hearts, and at last accomplish his cruel purpose of their ruin? Who shall answer these questions?—the heart sinks in asking them. Oh, if on the eve of a day which was to decide a nation's destinies, one who agonized for her country

"Gave on the countless foe, a glance,
And thought on battle's desperate chance,"

surely the minister of Christ must have the same feeling as he looks on the countless enemies of his people, thinks on the interests at stake, and above all, on the uncertain issue! What are the destinies of a nation to those of a human soul? The only comfort is in again looking upwards, pouring forth the prayer of the text, and adding its hearty Amen. May we learn to do so on our own behalf! May God teach us to know our danger and helplessness; the countless evil influences which are arrayed against us to dazzle, bewilder, and mislead; may he constrain us under this conviction, to cast ourselves on his Almighty strength, to ask that it may be given us, to seek that we may find. May he be pleased I say again, to shew to us this great mercy! Amen, and Amen.

I dismiss the consideration of this precious epistle with one parting word. It begins by telling us that God has broken silence and spoken to man in these last days through the cross and resurrection of his Son; it declares throughout, his purpose in having done so, viz. that he might renew his apostate creature after his own image again, and fit him to

dwell for ever with his Redeemer and Lord. And the mind of the writer was cast into the mould of the glorious truths which he has thus delivered. Let us observe the two Amens with which he concludes this word of exhortation. When the glory of Christ is the theme, his whole soul is poured out in sympathy; when it is the salvation of man, his whole soul is poured out in prayer. Let our minds who have read and considered what he has written, be cast into the same mould. For this is the mind of Christ, the law of love to God and man written on the tablets of the heart; that conformity to the image of the Blessed which prepares us for his presence hereafter. It is the end of all doctrine, exposition, and exhortation; the alpha and omega, the one thing needful. "Whoso findeth it, findeth life." The Lord therefore grant it to us!

And to Him be glory in the Church throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

THE END.



APPENDIX.

VOL. II.

Note I.—Page 13.

No one who has carefully studied the Epistle to the Hebrews, will require to be told that the passage to which this Lecture refers, is one of extreme difficulty ; it has been pronounced indeed by Dr. Bloomfield, and not without reason, as "perhaps the most perplexing in the New Testament." And having given an interpretation of it which may strike some readers as novel, it is incumbent on me to state the reasons which have satisfied my own mind that it is according to truth. It was first suggested by a brother-clergyman, the Rev. C. J. Goodhart, of Park Chapel, Chelsea.

There are two other renderings of this difficult Scripture. The first is that of our authorized version, making it refer to a testamentary disposition, deriving its validity from the death of the testator. The other which has the support of scholars no less eminent than those which maintain the former, makes it refer to a covenant, rendering the passage thus,—

For where a covenant is, there must of necessity, be brought in the death of the mediating sacrifice. For a covenant is valid over dead sacrifices ; since it is never of any force, while the mediating sacrifice continues alive.

We must consider both these interpretations before we proceed further.

I. There can be no doubt that the Greek word *διαθηκη* admits of being translated testament. The rendering of our authorized version cannot therefore be assailed on that ground. But two considerations appear to me to be strongly condemnatory of it.

The argument is inapplicable. It was necessary that Christ should die, the Apostle is represented as saying, because He has bequeathed to us the precious blessings of the gospel, and a testament has no force as long as the testator lives: But the only circumstance which makes the death of a testator necessary before his bequest can take effect, is that as long as a man lives, he has occasion for his own property. If it should be otherwise, and he is pleased to denude himself of that property by a voluntary act, his death is not necessary to make such bequest valid. If Christ by dying, had resigned for our use blessings and mercies for which He had no further occasion, the argument would be sound. But as things really are, it has no application to Him ; once indeed He was dead, but He is now alive for evermore ;

and though He has made us heirs of God, it is as joint-heirs with him. He neither resigns nor can resign anything, but remains eternally the "heir of all things." The legal maxim "*Nemo est heres viventis*" is therefore totally inapplicable here. For this purpose, as has been well remarked, "it is not merely necessary that a man should die, but that he should remain dead. If a man comes to life again, he resumes his property and the will is of no effect." (*Presbyterian Review*, No. lxxi.)

And this is not all; the rendering in question confuses the whole argument of the Apostle. He is represented as saying that Christ is "the Mediator of the New Testament." But a testament knows nothing of a Mediator. And again, that Christ's death was necessary "for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament." But a testament knows nothing of transgressions. A testament may indeed require the death of the testator and may remain invalid till such death take place. But let us take this as St. Paul's meaning and see whether we can carry it through his argument. "Wherefore," he continues, i.e. *on which account*, "neither the first testament was dedicated without blood. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people, he took the blood of calves and goats and sprinkled all the people, saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you." Now was this really the meaning of these Mosaic rites? were they designed to remind Israel that before God's testamentary disposition could take effect on their behalf, God the testator must die!! It is altogether impossible to maintain this. And St. Paul forbids us to do so, if we would. For he goes on to state the real purpose of these rites; they were designed, he says, to purge from sin, to procure its remission at the hand of God.

The late Professor Stuart felt this so strongly that in his Critical Commentary he gives two meanings to the word *διαθεν*, making it signify *testament* in v. 16, 17, which he considers a parenthesis, and *covenant* in v. 15, 18, and 20, which he regards as the main argument. But this makes the Apostle stop short in the midst of a train of clear and consecutive reasoning, to introduce matter altogether foreign to his purpose. With all just deference therefore to so eminent an expositor, I must regard this as a giving up of the whole question.

II. We come now to the other rendering, that of *covenant* and *mediating sacrifice*. I adopted it in the former edition of this work, but only, as I stated at the time, because I could not find a better. There are strong objections to it.

It is a strain upon the original to make *διαθεμενου*, the middle voice, take a passive signification. For the victim mediated by *being placed between* the parties and sacrificed. The *Presbyterian Review* seeks to remove this difficulty by reminding us that *Christ placed himself* between God and us. But this will not serve, for the Apostle makes a general statement and then applies it to Christ. Every covenant, he says, requires a victim placed between; therefore it was needful that the Son of God should die.

This rendering besides, confuses the argument of the Apostle. A victim *dying to ratify a covenant* and *dying to bear sin* are totally

distinct ideas. The one merely supposes a covenant *made*, the other supposes it *broken*. But the rendering in question makes these two ideas so run into each other, that a harmonious exposition of the passage is impossible.

Once more; this rendering leaves altogether out of view the statement of the fifteenth verse, that the death of Christ was for the redemption of the transgressions of the first covenant. The thought is indeed just and true, but why should St. Paul introduce it here? It has no necessary connection with his argument.

All these difficulties seem to me to be removed by the interpretation which I now submit. (I.) There is no question that *διαθεμενον* may without any strain on the original, be rendered *Covenanter* or *Covenant-Maker*. (II.) There is no confusion of ideas. One harmonious thought, that of a covenant ratified by the blood of victims, to shew that its penalty, if broken, was death, and of that penalty exacted when it was broken, pervades the entire argument. (III.) St. Paul's introduction of the Old-Testament saints is also most beautifully accounted for. He would place the Hebrews on the horns of a dilemma. They knew that their fathers had broken God's covenant. They must either have died then as covenant-breakers or Messiah must have died in their room!

A friend to whose judgment and superior scholarship I most willingly defer, (the Rev. Thomas S. Evans, one of the Masters of Rugby School), and who has done me the favour to examine this subject thoroughly, considers the rendering of *mediating sacrifice* or *victim placed between* wholly untenable, because the word itself never signifies *to place between*; and even if it did, the middle voice *διαριθμαται* could not be rendered *I place myself between*. He also, while admitting that the Greek will bear the rendering which I have given, feels himself constrained to object to the interpretation, "because it seems to imply so much more than the text itself. The parentheses" he says "ought to have been expressed in the Greek, they are far too important to have been omitted." In answer to this, I beg to say that I would not have presumed to have inserted them, if the language of the context had not shewn plainly that the idea which they express, was present to the Apostle's mind. He is speaking in the fifteenth verse, not simply of a covenant but of a covenant *broken*—"the transgressions of the first covenant." And we must carry this idea into the sixteenth and seventeenth verses; they go on to tell us that the penalty of such breach is death. I mention this to shew the reader that I have not adopted the view in question without mature consideration of whatever might be advanced against it. Nor is it altogether novel; I should not feel satisfied if it were. Ebrard gives the same sense of *διαθεμενον*—"him who makes the covenant." Only, he understands the Apostle to affirm that before a sinful creature *can make* a covenant with God, he must die or provide a victim to die for him. Whereas I understand him to affirm that if any one makes such a covenant *and breaks it*, the penalty of such breach is death.

In conclusion, let me say that while I do not feel myself warranted

to speak of this text as I have done of chapter v. 7, I believe that the interpretation given in the Lecture, is liable to no serious objection, and presents a harmonious and consistent view.

Note K.—Page 46.

It is stated in p. 44 of this lecture, that in simply believing the message which God is addressing to us in the gospel, we enter into abiding and eternal peace, and regard the question of our personal forgiveness to be "settled and disposed of, in the death and resurrection of Christ." These statements may occasion difficulty to some readers: if God does not tell all men that they are forgiven, it may be said, we must have some evidence of our personal forgiveness, beyond his bare word addressed to us in the gospel. In answer to this I would remark that though God does not tell all that they are forgiven, he proclaims a forgiveness to all and bids all put their trust in it; he tells us also that if we trust in it, it shall be ours for ever. And thus though the gospel does not declare to any individual that he shall be eternally partaker in its benefits, it proclaims to him a word of mercy sufficient to give peace to his conscience now, and to bring him, if he receive it, to eternal salvation hereafter. A king may proclaim pardon to a rebellious province; the amnesty may comprehend every rebel and be to him an immediate and sufficient ground of peace; and yet those only who lay down their arms, may partake eventually of the royal clemency. The gospel is an amnesty of exactly the same character. It is God's proclamation to a guilty world, and is addressed, as if by name and surname, to every sinner in the world (Mark xvi. 15). It tells him that he who hates his sin, tenderly loves his person and has provided forgiveness for him in the blood of Christ; it bids him cast himself on that mercy, and enter into peace with God. And yet, those only who receive God's message, shall eventually partake of his grace. It must be our consciousness of having received it then, is the immediate reply of many, which is our ground of peace. I would ask those who say so, what they understand by receiving the gospel. It is received by faith, and faith is believing on God's authority (see pp. 133, 134,) that he loves us as a Father, and freely, for Christ's sake, forgives all our sins. We cannot believe this without finding immediate peace; and to make this inestimable blessing the fruit of subsequent experience and of reflection on the state of our own hearts, is to destroy the very nature of faith. But the gospel-message, it is said again, cannot by itself, be a sufficient ground of peace, for it is addressed to many who perish in their sins, and the love and mercy which it proclaims, are as much to them as to us. Shall we refuse then to walk in the blessed sun-light, because our neighbour is blind? We do not act thus with the benefits of nature; we appropriate them at once, without inquiring what others do. And we must deal in the same manner with the inestimable benefits of redemption. We have nothing to do with our neighbours; in this solemn transaction we are all alone with God. The cross declares his love and mercy, and the

resurrection of Christ, (the broad seal of heaven to an accepted statement,) declares with equal distinctness, that those who cast themselves on that mercy, shall have eternal life. And we have therefore a sufficient ground for immediate, abiding and eternal peace, even though every other individual of Adam's race should reject this message, and by rejecting it, perish for ever.

The very great importance of the subject has induced me to be thus particular in its exposition. Feeling must have place in our religion ; a cold-hearted assent to truth, is no religion at all. But we must take heed that our feeling be based on faith. Many persons, I am persuaded, invert this order and base their faith on feeling. They conclude in other words, that God loves and has forgiven them, because they are conscious of certain pious emotions—instead of coming to this conclusion in the first place, on the authority of the holy gospel, and opening their hearts in the second place, to love, confidence and every truly pious emotion, as the fruit of faith in God. This is in fact the salvation of faith ; it saves by giving peace with God and drawing our hearts to Him as our Father. And feeling can have no other genuine root ; any other is fanaticism and will lead infallibly to false religion.

Note L.—Page 62.

I would say something in further elucidation of the much-contested question of ministerial absolution, referred to in p. 60 of this lecture. Two statements are made in the lecture, viz. that apostolic absolution extended only to this world, and that ministerial absolution now is merely declaratory. And these statements, I humbly think, will bear the fullest examination.

Christ gave to his apostles the power of binding and loosing, and also of remitting and retaining sin. We have an example of the exercise of the former power in the first council at Jerusalem ; they bound certain things on that occasion, on the consciences of the faithful, and loosed them from the necessity of observing the Jewish law. (See Acts xv.) We have two examples of the exercise of the latter. St. Paul retained the sin of that member of the Church at Corinth who had taken his father's wife, laying him under judgment, (1 Corinthians v. 1—5. 13) ; he retained also the sin of Hymeneus and Alexander, delivering them "to Satan, that they might learn not to blaspheme." (1 Timothy i. 20.) And upon the repentance of the Corinthian offender, the same apostle remitted his sin, and restored him to the communion of the Church. (II Corinthians ii. 5—10.) If the power of remitting sin granted to him and his brethren, was intended by God to go beyond this and to affect the decisions of the eternal judgment-seat, it is a most extraordinary and inexplicable circumstance that we have no record in the New Testament, of any apostle exercising it. It was quite otherwise with their Master ; he really possessed this power, and in proof of his possessing it, exercised it on many occasions. "Thy sins are forgiven thee," "thy faith hath saved thee,"—were words continually in his

mouth; but we do not hear them *once* from the mouths of his apostles. It is indeed true that they were his messengers as he was the messenger of the Father, and that he delegated to them the powers which the Father had given to him. But it was only in measure that he did so; there are certain prerogatives which cannot be delegated to the creature. The power of remitting sin, in the full sense of that expression, is, I am persuaded, one of these prerogatives. God may as soon delegate his omniscience and infinite wisdom; they are both required for its exercise. The Father gave it to the Son of Man, because he was also the Son of God.

This will appear more clearly when we consider the second point. It will be acknowledged at once that the absolution in our Church service, is merely declaratory; but it may be contended that in the service for the visitation of the sick, the Church of England teaches her ministers to assume a higher ground and to absolve men from their sins by the authority of the ministerial office. We must not however be led astray by words in forming our judgment of this matter. The expression, "by his authority committed to me I absolve thee from all thy sins," is certainly very strong; but if we look to the immediately-preceding clause, we shall find that the authority claimed is simply "power to absolve *all sinners who truly repent and believe.*" The prayer which follows, puts this in a still stronger light. The minister asks God to forgive the sick person, and that on the express ground of his being a penitent and putting his whole trust in Divine mercy through Christ. It is the absolution of *character* then and not of *persons*. These two things are as wide asunder as the poles. In the former case, we simply declare that God absolves those who humble themselves and seek his mercy; we also add, addressing the penitent, *thou professest to do so, and accepting thy profession, we absolve thee.* But this act is simply declaratory; we do not say that the profession is sincere, we only say that if it is so, God is faithful and just to forgive. In the absolution of *persons* on the other hand, the officiating minister declares, *Thou, by name and surname, art delivered from condemnation, and possessed of the favour of God.* He who pronounces such an absolution, must be possessed either of Divine omniscience, enabling him to discern with infallible certainty the existence of repentance and faith in the absolved person; or of Divine authority, to dispense with the laws of the kingdom of God and admit those into it who are morally unfit for its glories. Let those who claim this power for the Pope, tell us which of these prerogatives belongs to him. Perhaps they will say the latter, and remind us that he is the vicar of Christ; they little know that in saying so, they fulfil the words of Daniel, who tells us that "the little horn shall think to *change times and laws.*" (Daniel vii. 25.) But all who shrink back with horror from such fearful assumptions, must acknowledge the truth of the statement contained in the lecture. For to maintain that ministerial absolution is any thing more than declaratory, leads us direct to this blasphemy. God's ministers are the speakers of HIS WORD; if they add *EVEN ONE WORD OF THEIR OWN*, they defile their solemn consecration.

Note M.—Page 178.

The subject of *righteousness by faith* which is treated of in this and in the three preceding lectures, is one of the most important with which an expositor of Scripture can deal. There is an imputed, and there is also an imparted righteousness. "By the obedience of one" says St. Paul, "shall many be made righteous." (Romans v. 19) : "he that doeth righteousness" says St. John, "is righteous, even as he is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil." (1 John, iii. 7, 8.) Of which of these two then, the former or the latter, is St. Paul speaking in the first seven verses of the eleventh of Hebrews ?

To answer this question aright, let us first observe his language. He tells us that the elders "obtained a good report;" that Abel "obtained witness that he was righteous;" that Enoch "had this testimony that he pleased God;" that Noah "became heir of the righteousness which is by faith." These expressions are evidently meant to be synonymous; and if the sense of righteousness by imputation cannot be attached to what is said of the elders and of Enoch, we are precluded by every law of sound interpretation from attaching that meaning to what is said of Abel and of Noah. Besides, he says of Abel, not that he was accounted righteous, but that he *was* righteous, an expression never used to denote imputation. His language about Noah is ambiguous; but if we next observe his scripture-reference, the ambiguity is cleared away. He tells us of that patriarch that by believing the Divine warning concerning the coming flood and by preparing the ark at God's command, he became heir of righteousness. Now it is superfluous to say that it was not by these acts that Noah became a participator in the righteousness of his Redeemer. Let us turn to the book of Genesis, and we shall see at once to what the Apostle refers. Noah had gone on for an hundred and twenty years, patiently believing God and labouring at his appointed task; and at the end of that period God said to him from heaven, "These have I seen righteous before me." (Genesis vii. 1.)

But the doctrines of *imputed* and *imparted* righteousness, as we find them in God's holy word, are in perfect harmony with each other. St. Paul teaches us most distinctly in the first eleven verses of the fourth chapter of his epistle to the Romans, that when we cast ourselves as undone sinners on God's mercy through Jesus Christ, he "imputeth righteousness" to us "without works," i.e. freely pardons and accepts us in Christ the righteous One. The thief on the cross found salvation in this way, at the close of a life of crime; yea St. Paul himself found it, when his hands were yet red with "the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." But Scripture declares everywhere that the faith which thus justifies before God, is also the spring of holiness and leads to every good and righteous work. And as the purpose of the fourth of Romans is to set forth the one truth, so the purpose of the eleventh of Hebrews is to set forth the other. The Apostle's language about Abel teaches us concerning both. When God saw Adam's younger son present a lamb on his altar, renouncing himself and trusting in the

great sacrifice, he not only ACCEPTED him, but recognizing in his heart that principle which is the spring of righteousness, He pronounced him RIGHTEOUS. It is thus an eternal impossibility that the self-righteous should please God; self-renunciation is the first lesson in the school of Christ.

We are prone to imagine that we are saved by works; we are equally prone to think that if salvation is by faith, there is no need of works. I cannot therefore but remark it as a most beautiful feature of this interesting portion of the epistle that in the first case cited, the principle of faith and it alone is mentioned, and no works whatever are referred to. For by declaring, as he does, that by the simple exercise of this faith Abel found acceptance with God, the Apostle teaches us most emphatically that salvation is not of works; whilst by declaring at the same time, that Abel was pronounced righteous, and by every case which follows from Enoch downwards, he teaches with equal plainness that works are the fruit of faith.

Note N.—Page 198.

If the reader is startled by the apparent novelty of the interpretation of Revelation i. 10. given in p. 185 of this lecture, I invite him to examine for himself every passage of the New Testament in which the phrase "day of the Lord" occurs; such an examination must satisfy him that I have stated the exact truth. It is true that the Greek expression in Revelations i. 10. is not *ἡμερα Κυρίου* but *ἡμερα σϋλας*; and I was at one time disposed to think that the common interpretation of it might be justified from that circumstance. But when I found St. Paul in I Corinthians iv. 3. using the parallel phrase *ἡμερα ἀνθρωπίνης* to denote the present condition of things when *man* is lord and ruler of the world, I was strengthened in my former conclusion; for by parity of reason *ἡμερα σϋλας* ought to signify that glorious day yet to come, when the will of him who sits on the throne shall be the law of a redeemed universe.

Note O.—Page 233.

It is very important that we have a distinct apprehension of the Divine object in that great trial of Abraham's faith which this Lecture is designed to illustrate. Dr. Candlish in his very able expositions of Genesis (vol. II. pp. 175—210.) presents a different view altogether from that which is presented in the Lecture. Abraham's expectation of an immediate resurrection for Isaac seems to him to turn his trial into an exhibition. He therefore considers the words of the Apostle "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead," to refer to the final state of resurrection-blessedness when both he and Isaac were to inherit the glory of God. And the Divine purpose in the trial, he understands to have been, to loosen the patriarch's affections entirely from a present world and to carry his faith and expectation forward to the rest which "remaineth for the people of God."

Now it is to me an insuperable objection to this view that Abraham's

expectations of salvation through Messiah were bound up with Isaac's *life in this world*. If then, in taking the knife to slay him, he really gave up all hope of ever seeing him again in the flesh, what became of these God-given expectations? He must have resigned them. And how shall we make this harmonize with the statement, which Dr. Candlish himself so beautifully illustrates, that in the solemn transaction of Mount Moriah the patriarch saw the suffering Messiah's day? Here was no resigning of expectations to be realized in this world; such expectations were on the contrary confirmed.

I am disposed to take another view of the Divine purpose in the patriarch's trial. His whole life was a training and a discipline to teach him faith in God. Now it is faith in God when we believe His word. But it is a higher exercise of faith to trust God himself in the absence of all word; and it is faith's highest exercise to fall back in calm confidence on the Divine character when God's ways are dark and His words are contradictory. Abraham had been taught the lowest of these exercises of faith; he had believed without a moment's hesitation the promises of the land and of the seed. But when God had left him without any word, as in Egypt and subsequently in Gerar, he had shewn himself so grievously deficient in confidence in the Divine character, as to be betrayed into positive sin. His fault on the former occasion, was passed over; but on his falling into it the second time, God took means through severe trial and suffering, to raise to a higher standard of attainment, the father of all them that should believe. He therefore led him into circumstances of the greatest possible perplexity, in which he was not only left without any clear word to guide him, but was bewildered by promises and commands utterly contradictory of each other. And by commanding him then to advance, He taught him what faith was. And the patriarch learned the lesson; learned it indeed through suffering of the flesh, but learned it effectually, coming out of the furnace as gold seven times refined.

It is in this way we must understand the words "accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." When the gigantic difficulty presented itself to the patriarch's mind, that Isaac's death would cause God's word to fail, he comforted himself by remembering that there was nothing which God could not do to justify His faithfulness and truth. If for this end, said Abraham, resurrection-power must be exerted, that power shall not be withheld. And deeply feeling therefore that his duty was implicit obedience, "he took the knife to slay his son."

I can see no exhibition here, but only solemn reality.

Note P.—Page 260.

The reader will find the anecdote from Roman history, which occurs in pp. 250, 251, in Livy, Book XXVI. cap. 11. Having spoken of Hannibal, the writer says, "*Minuere etiam spem ejus et alias, PARVA magnaque, res; parva autem quod per eos dies EUM FORTE AGRUM IN QUO IPSE CASTRA HABEBAT, VENISSE, NIHIL OB ID DIMINUTO*

PRETIO, cognitum ex quodam captivo est." Little things, as this author tells us, are sometimes of importance. Hannibal judged rightly that the field in question finding a purchaser and bringing its natural price, was a certain sign of the perfect confidence of the Romans that they should be finally victorious over him. The legacy of Jacob to Joseph was in like manner a small thing in itself ; but it was a certain sign of the perfect confidence of faith.

Note Q.—Page 360.

The two verses which form the subject of this lecture, are a passage of acknowledged difficulty. This difficulty has arisen from expositors having taken it for granted that "the promise" which the Old Testament-saints did not receive, was the advent of Messiah to make atonement for their sins. Professor Stuart understands it in this way, and explains also the phrase that follows it, viz. "some better thing," to signify the advent of Messiah. Other expositors wishing perhaps to avoid the inconsistency of attaching the same meaning to phrases so dissimilar, explain the former to signify Messiah's advent, and the latter, the happiness of the heavenly world. But the learned Professor asks, and with reason, "In what sense is heavenly blessedness vouchsafed to later more than to ancient saints ?" If the reader will consider the verses carefully, he will, I think, agree with me that "the promise" and being "made perfect," must signify the same thing. For the Apostle's statement is that God delayed to fulfil his promise to the Old Testament-saints till he had provided some better thing for us, and that his purpose was that they and we should then be perfected together. The promise therefore which they did not receive, was the promise of perfect salvation, i. e. of final glory. This representation is also in harmony with the rest of the chapter, which speaks of that final glory as having been the chief object of their faith and hope. For the ancient Church from Enoch and Abraham downwards, knew much more of the kingdom than of the cross of Messiah. If this interpretation of the text be adopted, the whole difficulty vanishes.

Note R.—Page 373.

The reader will observe that a double meaning is attached in this lecture to the word "witnesses." I certainly should not act on such a principle in expounding uninspired writings, but it is different, I conceive, with the words of God. They contain a depth of meaning which we ought to endeavour to sound ; and if any expression of the Holy Ghost can be legitimately proved to have a double signification, the Church of God is entitled to the benefit and comfort of both its meanings. From the imagery employed in the verse which is the subject of this lecture, the apostle had evidently two ideas before his mind. The phrases "laying aside every weight" and running an appointed "race," are borrowed from the Olympic games, and answer to

the image of the crowd of spectators looking on. But when he speaks of "the sin which doth so easily beset us," St. Paul forsakes the language of imagery for that of plain reality; and the meaning which he intends to convey, corresponds, as we have seen in the lecture, with the other signification of "witnesses." There is thus in the text a twofold exhortation with a twofold motive. We are desired to put away distrust of God, because those who have preceded us, bear testimony that he is true: we are desired to run our race with patience, because they are watching our course from on high.

Note S.—Page 388.

It is needless to say that the anecdote which is introduced in p. 387, refers to the late lamented Duke of Wellington. It was related to me many years ago by a General in the British army. But from the gravity essential to theological exposition, the words of the soldier have lost in my hands something of their enthusiastic fervour. He cried, "There's the Duke, God bless him, I'd rather see his face than a whole brigade!" A military friend with whom I conversed on this subject, said that though he had never heard the anecdote, he could well conceive it to be true; the presence of that distinguished General, he added, was at any time worth five thousand men, because it never entered into the minds of the soldiers that he could be defeated, and they were therefore indomitable when they saw him beside them. And a brother in the ministry whose career began as a soldier, mentioned to me that he was present when the body of the French army bore down on a mere handful of our men in the plains of Pampeluna. The British General hearing of the danger, hastened forward almost alone to join his little band, and the shout which ran along the British line, immediately announced his presence. The French were intimidated and fell back.

Such anecdotes are valuable, because the natural illustrates the spiritual. And I beg to remind the reader that the illustration is not mine; the blessed Spirit tells us that Jesus is the Captain of our salvation, and that his people are his good soldiers. It is true of the spiritual Israel in a much higher sense than of the natural, that "the shout of a king is among them." (Numbers xxiii. 21.) And this is not the shout which a king gives, but that shout of a people which announces a leader's presence; a presence which they feel to be protection, safety, and the certain pledge of victory. Faith makes us conscious of this presence. And it is only when this faith fails that the Christian *can be* overthrown; let it abide unshaken, and it renders him INDOMITABLE.

Note T.—Page 415.

The subject of God's dealings with Esau, referred to in pp. 239—245, and again in this lecture, pp. 411—415, is one of the utmost importance and well deserves our most attentive consideration. For that

unhappy man is the prototype of the reprobate, and we see in his case a pattern of God's dealings with all who come short of his salvation.

I have endeavoured to shew in both lectures, that the reprobation of Esau was *conditional*, i.e. that God was provoked to that dreadful act by his sin. The language of St. Paul in the ninth of Romans will be immediately adduced in objection; it is there declared, it will be said, that *before the children were yet born or had done any good or evil*, God said to their mother, "Jacob have I loved, *but Esau have I hated*." Before entering on the consideration of that important Scripture, let me call the reader's attention particularly to Hebrews xii. 16, 17, and put two questions to him. St. Paul declares that Esau "*was reprobated (ἀπεδοκιμασθῆν) AFTERWARDS*," i.e. that his reprobation was *subsequent to the sale of the birthright*. Have I then, or have I not, honestly expounded the Apostle's words? Every one must answer that I have. Is it then conceivable, I ask in the second place, that a man guided by inspiration of the Holy Ghost could write to the believing Jews at Rome, *Esau was rejected in his mother's womb before he had done either good or evil*, and could write only a few years after to their brethren in Palestine, *take heed that you do not follow the example of Esau's profaneness, lest you share also in the rejection which was the punishment of his sin*. No ingenuity of man can harmonize these two statements; it is impossible that both of them can express the mind of God.

What then, it may be asked, are we to understand by the Apostle's language in the Romans? In answer to this I have first to observe that this language is not fairly quoted. St. Paul does not say that before the children were born, God declared "Esau have I hated;" such a statement is not to be found in the scripture from which he is quoting. He says that God declared that "*the elder*" of these unborn children should "*serve the younger*;" language expressing simple prescience, combined with purpose of good. The words "Esau have I hated," were spoken not merely after Esau was born, but many hundred years after his death. The reader will find them in Malachi i. 3, where they occur in connection with the strongest expressions of moral disapprobation; Edom is called "The border of *wickedness*, and, The people against whom the Lord hath *indignation for ever*." I would next request the reader to study the scope of the ninth chapter of Romans. It is a peculiarity of St. Paul's style that he is continually anticipating every possible objection and answering it as he proceeds. The first five verses of the chapter in question are a lamentation of the loving Apostle over his blinded and hardened brethren of the house of Israel, on whom so many privileges had been bestowed in vain. But do not imagine, he goes on to say in the sixth verse, that the word of God has taken "none effect;" that any moral result can take the Divine Being by surprise, can frustrate his purposes or throw him out of his calculations. These hardened and blinded ones are indeed the seed of Abraham, the people whom God has caused to cleave to him "for a name, and for a praise, and for a glory." (Jeremiah xiii. 11.) But "they are not all Israel which are of Israel;" there is another seed, a

seed of promise, in whom God shall not be disappointed. Ishmael was of Abraham, and yet the word in the beginning was, "In Isaac shall thy seed be called." Yea, Esau was of Abraham, and yet Esau was rejected while his younger brother was preferred. And the unworthiness of Esau did not take God by surprise. Before her children were born or had done either good or evil, i. e. before there was any thing to indicate their future history to man's eye, he to whom all his works are known from the beginning, announced it to Rebekah. He was perfectly aware of the unworthiness both of Esau and Jacob; he foresaw with infallible certainty its results in the case of Esau; he knew his purpose of grace toward Esau's brother. "Is there then unrighteousness with God," asks the Apostle? Can he deal unjustly with the creatures of his hands? "God forbid" is his reply; "He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion."

The ninth chapter of Romans completely bears out in this way the doctrine which I have endeavoured to lay down in pp. 242, 243, and p. 258. For it represents the perdition of Esau and of all the reprobate as an act of RIGHTEOUS JUDGMENT, and ascribes the salvation of Jacob and of all the elect to SOVEREIGN GRACE. It must be acknowledged that this is an inscrutable mystery; we are constrained to stand still where apostles stood reverently before us, and adore where we cannot comprehend. But it is one thing to say that the Divine Being is incomprehensible, and quite another to represent him as arbitrary and cruel. *Conditional* reprobation, i. e. rejection on account of sin, is wholesome and salutary, though it is awful and solemn; but *unconditional* reprobation, i. e. hopeless rejection by God before we have done either good or evil, is an idea full of horror, conjuring up in the mind the most dreadful and most unholy feeling to which it can be conscious, viz. that we are in the hands of One whose power exceeds his benevolence.

Note U.—Page 431.

The subject of the perfection of the Old Testament-saints referred to, in pp. 427—30 of this lecture, has been brought four times before us in our progress through the epistle. We considered it in expounding Chapter ii. 15. (Vol. I. pp. 143—146); again, in expounding Chapter x. 20. (Vol. II pp. 69, 70); again, in expounding Chapter xi. 40. (pp. 352, 353); and we have now considered it once more. The language of the Apostle in the third of these texts "that they without us should not be made perfect," told us plainly that these saints left the world before they had attained the perfection. While his language in the second of them, in which he speaks of the way to God by Christ as not "living" only but "new," told us as plainly what this unattained blessing was. It was perfection "as pertaining to the conscience," "boldness to enter into the holiest." Again, in the first text, which speaks of the Son of God becoming incarnate and dying to "deliver them," we were told how this perfection was attained.

And now in the fourth text these saints are brought before us in the actual enjoyment of the blessing.

This seems to me to throw most satisfactory light on the very difficult subject of the condition of the Old Testament-Church in Hades. Whatever may have been the locality of that region, (see *Horae Hebraicae* pp. 290—301.) I feel assured that the substantial change effected in the condition of Old Testament-believers when they were delivered from it, was that represented in these different expositions. Jesus, who in all things hath the preeminence, must necessarily have been the first of the sons of Adam either in the visible or invisible world, to salute the Most High as a Father.

Note V.—Page 462.

I am indebted to a friend for the emendation of Matthew xix. 4, given in p. 456. If the reader will turn to the passage in question, he will at once discover both the important character and absolute necessity of the emendation. The purpose of our Lord is to prove that it was not God's original design to allow men to put away their wives. It is no proof of this, that God made mankind at the beginning "male and female." It is on the other hand, a most triumphant and unanswerable demonstration of it, that God made them "a male and a female," binding one indissolubly to one. It also agrees with the history of the creation; for God made one woman Eve, to one man Adam.

Volumes might be written in proof of the heavy charges brought against the Romish apostacy in pp. 458, 459; but I have no wish to soil the mind of the reader by entering into such disgusting details. Lest however he should ask my authority for saying that the Romish Church teaches that *fornication is a venial offence, and that the marriage of a priest is a GREATER SIN than fornication*, I refer him first, to Bishop Jewell's apology, written in 1562. In the commencement of the fourth part the writer says, "Let the Pope make use of his own memory; let him be pleased to consider that they are his own canonists who have taught the people that simple fornication is no sin...let him consider they are his own again who have determined that a priest is not to be deposed for fornication. Let him remember that Cardinal Campeggio, Albertus Pighius, and many others of his lawyers, have taught that the priest who keeps a concubine, lives much more chastely and holily than he who has a lawful wife." If the reader desires further evidence, I refer him second, to the famous work of Albertus Pighius, viz. "*Explicationes Catholicae precipuarum Controversiarum*," at p. 215. The writer is handling the question whether it is a less sin (minus malum, *minusque damnable!*) for a priest to fall into uncleanness or to marry. I give his very words lest I should be thought to misrepresent. "In quibus," he says, "*si quando remissiones ex infirmitate carnis occiderimus, tolerabilius hoc peccatum est, quam si jugum in totum excutiamus*," i.e. by marriage. I refer the reader in the third place, to a note in the Rhemish testament, on I Corinthians

vii. 9. "We say also," says the writer, "concerning others lawfully made priests...they cannot marry at all, and there is no comparison in them between marriage and fornication. For their marriage is but pretended, and is the worst sort of fornication"! I refer him finally, to the words of Jewell in his defence of his Apology. "If a priest marry a wife," he says, "ye excommunicate, ye deprive him, ye disquiet and trouble the whole Church. But if he keep a concubine, one, two, or more, ye are then contented, and ready, not only to dissemble it, but also with favour to excuse it."

The charges contained in the lecture are now sufficiently proved. And let no one answer that though the Romish Church held these doctrines at one time, she is altered now. INFALLIBILITY CANNOT ALTER; *vestigia nulla retrorsum* has ever been the consistent motto of that apostacy. She taught these things at the time of the Reformation; if any of her advocates shall say that she does not teach them now, let him acknowledge that she is not infallible.

It is a striking collateral proof of the real character of Romish teaching in England at the period of the Reformation, that the prayer in our Litany "From fornication and all *other* deadly sin, good Lord, deliver us" occurs first in King Edward's Primer of 1553. The Romish Primers had "From fornication and all deadly sin, good Lord, deliver us." Now as it is quite evident that a man may use this latter form of prayer, whilst believing fornication to be venial, our Reformers seem to have sought for a mode of expression which should disabuse the minds of the people of that dreadful doctrine by condemning the fornicator out of his own mouth.

I ask pardon of the reader for entering into these details. They are important as proving the indissoluble connection between faith and righteousness; for that apostacy which has corrupted the Christian faith is thus shewn to be also the patron of immorality, "the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." (Revelation xvii. 5.)

Note W.—Page 477.

Spanheim's Ecclesiastical History fully bears out the statement in p. 474 of this Lecture, that as Christian simplicity became more and more corrupted, Churches were built after the form of Solomon's temple. In p. 234 of that work the reader will find an account of the Churches of the fourth century, and the frontispiece contains the plan of one of them with its outer court, its holy place, and its holiest of all, exactly on the Jewish model.

And there are a host of testimonies both Roman Catholic and Protestant to the truth of the statement made in p. 475 about the statue of Jupiter being now called St. Peter and worshipped under that name. The reader may consult "*Itinerario di Roma*," a Roman Catholic work, from which the following is an extract. "At the extreme end of the nave of St. Peter's, is a statue of St. Peter sitting, all of bronze, with the foot extended, which the devotees kiss in passing. Leo the Great caused this statue to be made (as it is said)

of the bronze from the statue of Jupiter Capitolinus." The reader will find the same thing in almost every Protestant work on the subject. He may consult "Clark's Glimpses of the Old World," "Fisk's Pastor's Memorial," "Daubuz on the Revelation," "Elliot's Horae Apocalypticæ," &c. I will quote however, before dismissing the subject, a very important sentence from "Rome in the 19th Century," a work which has passed through four editions. "The grand object of adoration" says the writer, "is St. Peter himself. He was undoubtedly and confessedly an ancient bronze statue, either a god or a consul; and here he sits in state, with the modern additions of a glory on his head, and a couple of keys in his hand, holding out his toe to be kissed by the pious multitude who continually crowd around it for that purpose."

I would also call the reader's particular attention to a statement which is made in the same page, viz. that the Church began with Judaism, and has glided by degrees into this unblushing Heathenism. True religion has been essentially the same under every dispensation; the faith of such men as Samuel and David "pierced the shadows" of Moses, "and laid hold of the coming substance." (Vol. 1, p. 464.) But Judaism as a dispensation, had many features in common with Heathenism. They both recognized a mediating priesthood, the necessity of sacrifices, and the virtue of external observances: it required indeed the personal superintendence of Jehovah to prevent the one from running into the other. We need not wonder then that when Judaism ceased to be a Divine religion, and when that gracious superintendence was in consequence withdrawn, its putrid remains, like the manna which was kept beyond the time appointed, should have been "the savour of death unto death" in the Church of God. And it was so. The mystery of iniquity was working in St. Paul's days; we discern unequivocal indications of it in his epistle to the Churches of Galatia. Satan began then that dreadful work which is now consummated in Papal Rome. Any thing therefore which in this present day, would bring us back to Jewish practices, should be most carefully and anxiously eschewed. The man who endeavours to do so, aims at the very life of the Church.

END OF VOL. II.

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